

**AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN URBAN SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS: NATIONAL STORIES OF SUCCESS**

A Dissertation

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to examine and interpret the life experiences and leadership practices of four African American male superintendents leading urban school districts across the nation. The research approach adopted in this dissertation used semi-structured interviews with four African American male superintendents that consisted of three main issues: (1) African American male superintendent identity, (2) African American male superintendent leadership, and (3) acts of equity leadership related to student outcomes.

The findings of this study revealed that participants do not allow themselves to be defined by their positions, and they honor their responsibilities as educational leaders who have devoted their lives to providing a quality education for their students. Each participant acknowledged that certain aspects of their jobs may be affected by their race, yet each expressed the importance of focusing on the work and remaining committed to reaching their goals for the districts they lead. The superintendents expressed importance of collaborative leadership that is inclusive of all stakeholders while they embraced the responsibilities carried by the positions they hold. The thoughts, expressions, and sometimes emotions conveyed by the superintendents provide a clear view into who they are, how they lead, and what they are about as urban school district leaders.

This study reveals that superintendents' top priority is to ensure that every student has access to a quality education. This research recommends further study regarding African American male access to the superintendency, expanded access to

opportunities for mentorship, professional development focused on community relations and partnerships, and further study specific to African American male leadership in diverse settings.

## **DEDICATION**

“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” -(Proverbs 22:6).

This dissertation is dedicated in the memory of my father, the late Peter Elroy Carrier; my grandmothers, the late Bessie Mae Prejean, the late Amy Carrier, the late Ruth Bell; my grandfathers, the late Isaac Philip Prejean, and the late Richard C. Bell.

I miss you all dearly and I know that you each would be very proud, not only of this work, but of the man I have become. Were it not for your guidance, encouragement, and love, I may certainly have traveled a different path thus far. My endearing love to each of you.

To my family, momma (Clara Muller), my wife Robyn, my daughters Sydnee and Peyton, my brother Jeff, my in laws Rickey and Geraldine Brown, my brother Jeramaine, and extended family and friends, thank you does not begin to describe my appreciation for your continued love and support throughout this process. Thank you each and I love you all!

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All work for the dissertation was completed by the student, under the advisement of Professor Norvella Carter of the Teaching Learning and Culture Department.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is one of the most important factors in the success of any individual, community, society, or country (Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Public education has been in constant transition and transformation since the inception of formal education, and the current state of public education in America is one of challenges and threats that are unlike those ever experienced or seen before in our history (Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Educators are indeed facing the most important work of our time, and those tasked with the responsibility of leading that work, the school district superintendent, must act urgently, decisively, and courageously as the future of our nation's children hangs in the balance (CGCS, 2014). School district superintendents, urban district leaders in particular, must have an ability to lead change (CGCS, 2014). In most cases, the influence of the superintendent has to bring about change, and to do that, he must provide a means to transform what is into what needs to be (Bolden et. al., 2003).

As stated in the “Urban Educator” newsletter published by the Council of Great City Schools (2014), the superintendent of schools has one of, if not the most, demanding, challenging, and influential school leadership positions in America. The position requires an unparalleled commitment to excellence that demands a focus on performance at all levels, and a courageous approach to addressing and overcoming obstacles and challenges stemming from an array of sources and circumstances (CGCS, 2014).

As the ultimate instructional leader of a school district, the superintendent of schools must provide guidance and direction to the instructional program of the district, while navigating financial, operational, and political avenues simultaneously (Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). As school systems are becoming increasingly more diverse, a need for an increasing population of diverse school district leaders is growing as well (Hodgkinson, 1999; Fenn & Mixon, 2011). America has entered an era that requires greater accountability, and the requirements for what children must know and be able to do (greater instructional standards) have greatly increased as well. School district superintendents are charged with making significant and swift improvements in the academic performance of the nation's most vulnerable children (CGCS, 2014).

They must break down barriers to reform and build capacity for quality teaching and learning in their schools. They must unite parents, educators, school boards, and business and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional purpose. Amidst the highly politicized environments of big city school districts, superintendents must serve as collaborators, visionaries, good communicators, and agents of change. (CGCS, 2014)

Leadership, or the concept of, has been studied and defined in a variety of ways over the past century. A search on leadership literature reveals a series of perspectives initiated from the "Great Man" and "Trait" theories, evolving to "Transformational" leadership. Early theories focus primarily upon the characteristics and actions of successful leaders and later theories encompass the role of followers and the contextual nature of leadership (Bolden, et. al, 2003). Leadership shapes and influences the actions

and behaviors of individuals, a concept that begins almost immediately following birth, and establishes a leadership persona.

The role of an educational leader is arduous, complex, and seldom honored. But without education and educational leaders answering the charge, the causes of democracy, equity, justice and human dignity would be in grave danger (Thomas & Brainbridge, 2001, p. 7). The job becomes even more complicated by the fact that our school systems are becoming increasingly more diverse (Hodgkinson, 1999; Fenn & Mixon, 2011).

The urgency to have school district leaders who both recognize and value cultural differences falls slightly behind the need of having this population be more representative of the stakeholders they serve (Schlechy, 1990; Kowalski, et al 2011). This requirement has necessitated a greater responsibility to student achievement while addressing the diversification of students and staffs, the emergence of growing technological opportunities, and a broader set of expectations from many entities including federal and state governments, school boards, and community stakeholders (Kowalski, et al 2011).

### **Operational Theories**

Today's public school environment consists of accountability systems that feature high stakes assessments, minimal to insufficient funding, and a myriad of various other pressures and demands (CGCS, 2010). Additionally, urban school districts contend with serving communities that are struggling to transcend economic distress in neighborhoods experiencing increased rates of crime and violence with high levels of

civic disengagement (CGCS, 2010). The current situation of urban schools brings cause for school districts to reassess their needs and the characteristics of their leaders.

Considering the afore stated conditions, and coupled with increasingly diverse student populations, school districts must recognize the need for diversity within their districts, with particular focus on high-ranking administrative positions and specifically the superintendent.

Since 1982, more African Americans have received appointments to the superintendency of major urban districts with large and rapidly growing minority populations (Jones & Montenegro, 1985). According to Simmons (2005), African Americans have faced several challenges beyond those facing all superintendents, including the two primary challenges of accessing the superintendency, and being appointed to problem-ridden, low performing districts. Using statistics from 2010 employing the parameters of serving fewer than 300 students, 300 to 2, 999 students, 3,000 students to 24,999, and districts serving greater than 25,000 students, a sampling of 1,800 districts revealed that 1,692 were led by a White or European American superintendent as opposed to only 36 districts being led by a Black or African American superintendent. Statistically, large urban districts comprise a smaller number of school districts, but by category, represent a larger number of school systems led by superintendents of color (CGCS, 2010).

Demographic trends reveal that upper middle class suburban school districts are growing and creating a shift in community demographics of urban school districts (CGCS, 2010). This demographic change and consequent shift, affected largely by economic conditions in urban centers, increases challenges for urban schools under the

accountability systems that govern them (CGCS, 2010). While the demographic makeup of districts, urban and suburban, continues to change, the ethnic identification of those leading districts remains relatively unchanged, leaving an under-representation or disproportional representation of African American superintendents as a result.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Arising in the 1970's, Critical Race Theory (CRT) began when a group of lawyers, activists and legal scholars realized that the Civil Rights movement could no longer progress toward equality without new theories and strategies to address forms of racism. According to some scholars (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995), critical race theory initiated as a movement in law and is a product of a prior movement known as Critical Legal Studies. Critical Legal Studies, or CLS, is a legal study started by a legal movement contesting the idea that "the civil rights struggle represents a long, steady march toward social transformation" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1334). CLS scholars critiqued mainstream legal ideology for its depiction of society in the U.S. as a meritocracy, but they did not include racism in the critique (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Additionally, CRT has been used to examine how "educational policies and practices in areas such as graduate education, school funding, curriculum and instruction, and bilingual education have had a negative racial impact on African Americans" (Parker, 2001 p. 38).

Delgado (1995), and Ladson-Billings (2013), identifies the tenets of CRT as follows: First, racism is ordinary, not aberrational. Second, white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group. Third, "social construction" thesis holds that race and races are products of

social thought and relations. Fourth, how a dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labor market. Fifth, intersectionality and anti-essentialism is the idea that each race has its own origins and ever-evolving history. Sixth, voice-of-color thesis holds that because of different histories and experiences to white counterparts', matters that the whites are unlikely to know can be conveyed.

Critical race theorists identify racism as “a means by which society allocates privilege and status [and] racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people’s homes” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.17). Hence, racism can also be known as the hidden rules of a culture.

CRT scholars propose that society does not see racism because it is a daily reality. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) and Ladson-Billings (1999), racism is ordinary and a natural part of everyday life. They also conclude that racism is ingrained in organizations, practices, and structures. According to Lopez (2003), “CRT aims to expose and reveal White privilege in its various permutations and divulge a social order that is highly stratified and segmented along racial lines.” Ladson-Billings (2012) asserts, “all social sciences were infused with conceptions of race and racist notions, and since education draws heavily from social sciences those views of race find their way into education scholarship”.

An important tenet of CRT is “interest convergence” (Bell, 1995). Bell (1995) implied that Whites will admit and advance African-Americans when it is to their (Whites’) benefit and in their interest. For example, *Brown v. Board of Education*



became law because the material interest of Whites converged with the civil rights interests of African-Americans at that point in time (Bell, 1995; Lopez, 2003).

African- Americans in general have suffered inequitable treatment throughout the course of our nation's history. This societal practice has both overtly and subliminally limited and stymied the opportunities for Blacks in the field of education and, more specifically, the position of leadership within public education (Scott, 1980). Though one may hypothesize the reasons for this, research has indicated that Black men who aspire to the position of the public school superintendent face obstacles such as a lack of mentors, racism in hiring practices, and unfair or unjust expectations (Glass et al., 2000).

Blacks are woefully under- represented in the superintendent ranks nationally. Less than 2% of superintendents nationwide are Black men. Tallerico (2000) argues that Blacks are qualified and can have a more representative percentage in the overall pool of superintendents but that their numbers are suppressed by a "gatekeeper" system that makes a concerted effort to keep them out. However, as the need for African American presence in school systems increases based on conditions that many educators care not to address, interest convergence will play a greater role in increasing the population of district leaders employed in the position. "Interest convergence stresses that racial equality and equity for people of color will be pursued and advanced when they converge with the interests, needs, expectations, and ideologies of Whites" (Milner IV, 2008).

Lastly, the foundation of CRT is affirmed in the realities of the lived experiences of racism. Researchers (Bell, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Jackson, 2002) assert that telling

appropriately used stories and counter-stories (of African-Americans in particular) is an effective and powerful way to negate a belief system that promotes negative stereotypes and ideas about African-Americans. Story telling has historically been utilized as an antidote to heal the pain caused by racial oppression (Lynn, 2000). The shared experiences and stories of African-Americans African-American male superintendents can be helpful in addressing policies and practices intended to discriminate against other African-Americans. Delpit (1995) argued that one of the tragedies in the field of education is the manner in which the voices of African Americans have been kept silent. This study breaks the silence as the stories of four African American male superintendents are told.

### **Ethic of Care Theory**

Introduced in the 1970's by Harvard Graduate School of Education student Carol Gilligan, the "ethic of care" concept became a topic of study resulting from her work "*In a Different Voice*" (Gilligan, 1982). The formation of transformational leaders employs the "ethic of care" theory to motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task (Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2010). These leaders are focused on the performance of group members, but also want each person to fulfill his or her potential. Leaders with this style often have high ethical and moral standards (Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2010). Further, the Ethic of Care theory is a normative ethical theory; that is, a theory about what makes actions right or wrong (Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2010).

The caring ethic suggests that the leader approaches the needs of the subordinate from the (subjective) perspective of “I must do something” rather than the more objective “something must be done” approach (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Leaders are encouraged by this philosophy to perform conscious acts of “being with” and “doing for” for the sake of those they are responsible for leading (Owens & Ennis, 2005). This approach requires the leader to take personal responsibility in the growth and success of the organization, and in this case, the school district they lead (Owens & Ennis, 2005).

Valerie O. Pang, professor in the School of Teacher Education at San Diego State University, and author of *Multicultural Education: A Caring-Centered, Reflective Approach*, discusses culture's role in the learning process and in students' identity development (Pang, 2001). Pang, in her book, includes a chapter on consciousness raising, the process of increasing knowledge and concerned awareness of social, political, economic, and environmental realities and issues, and/or of one's own nature, beliefs, behavior, and power -- often with the intent to effect change (Pang, 2001).

According to Pang, Rivera, and Mora (2000), multicultural education centered on the premise of care details a framework of values and behaviors in schools that promote motivation for students from all cultural backgrounds. “It addresses the tenet that every child has an innate desire to learn” (Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000). Educators that maintain a moral commitment to caring for all students in the context of cultural diversity view their contribution to societal equity through their efforts to create an educational system that prioritizes the academic, emotional, and social needs of children at the core of learning (Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000).

Caring is fundamental to the capacity of humans, and it assimilates into consistent behavioral patterns that affect interpersonal interactions as opposed to merely notions of sentiment (Ianni 1996; Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000). The concept of caring emphasizes the establishment of trusting relationships as the foundation for creating an effective academic and social climate for teaching and learning (Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000).

Multiculturalists focused on social-justice believe the primary core of education is to combat social oppression, alter the structure of society to make it more just, and create equitable educational opportunities (Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000). Consequently, a caring-centered multicultural environment transmits a sense of urgency in increasing levels of achievement and students' self-efficacy (Pang, Rivera, and & Mora, 2000). A caring and culturally relevant education and learning environment will encourage students to develop skills and promote success in school so that students can contribute to the creation of a more just society (Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000).

Schools should be places where both students and teachers learn, are valued, and develop capacities to care for each other and the greater society, and the person that must ensure such occurs is the school district superintendent (Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000).

### **Personal Story**

Like many of the thousands of students I have had the opportunity to work with and serve over the past twenty years, I was raised in a modest home by a single parent mother. Although my parents divorced when I was around the age of six, I always had access to my dad who struggled with alcohol addiction. My mother was a school

secretary and while she worked very hard at her job, she struggled to make ends meet. Despite her struggles, my mother always seemed to provide for my brother and I. One thing that was consistently stressed in our home was the importance of making good grades. What wasn't discussed was the idea that I could go to college. In fact, I cannot recall ever having that discussion growing up. We were just expected to make good grades, and if for some reason we did not, there would be consequences at home.

Family was a major influence growing up. My extended family, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were always very supportive and encouraged us to do well in school. Family meant, and to this day still means, more than a blood relationship. Family for me included friends, neighbors, and even my teachers. I can honestly say that I was never at a loss for support and encouragement.

Upon entering high school, I participated in sports, band, and other student organizations. While all had a positive impact on me, my participation in the Future Farmers of America (now National FFA Organization), probably had the most profound impact on me as a student, and ultimately, my career. I had no idea what the organization was about, and frankly, I wanted no part of even the discussion of becoming a "farmer". However, my Agriculture teacher, Mr. Raymond Polk, invited me to attend the state FFA convention the summer prior to my freshman year of high school, and that experience is one that I will never forget. I had never really been or traveled anywhere before, so I was understandably excited to be going to Amarillo, Texas for the convention and upon entering the coliseum and seeing that sea of blue and gold, I was mesmerized. I remember listening to the state officers give their outgoing officer

addresses and the stories each told. One in particular, Mr. Coby Shorter, struck a chord with me. He was the state president, and he was Black. There were very few African American students in attendance, so few that I don't remember any. Coby however, became someone I wanted to be like. He piqued my curiosity and inspired me to become involved in the organization.

Throughout my time in high school, I was voted captain of the football team, captain of the band, national honor society officer, vice president, and president of the FFA chapter. While I never sought those honors, I always seemed to be thrust into leadership positions. As a member of the various organizations, I was afforded the opportunity to visit various college campuses for competitive events which is how I was introduced to the idea of possibly attending college after high school. Mr. Polk, one of four African American male teachers I had throughout grade school, was a constant source of support and encouragement, and to this day still serves as my mentor. The others, coach Stan Hill, Mr. Charles Styles (middle school principal), and Mr. Harvey Dixon (high school assistant principal), all played a supportive role, but none like Mr. Polk. A “hard man” by many people's assertions, Mr. Polk instilled in his students a desire to be the best, and to perform at the highest level at all times. Good enough just never seemed to be good enough for him, and that is a trait that I have carried forth with me. Consistency was non-negotiable with him. Our practices were grueling at times, and we worked until exhaustion in an effort to prepare ourselves to perform at a high level. A man of character, integrity, honesty, and humility, Raymond Polk has quite simply been the greatest example of a leader I have ever had in my personal life.

I attended Stephen F. Austin state university where I majored in and earned my bachelor's degree in Agriculture. My experience at SFA was very similar to that of high school, in that I was the only Black Ag major the entire time I was there, but I was treated well, and the experience was one that I will always cherish. While in college I was offered the opportunity to work for DuPont as an intern, and following that experience, I was certain that was the career path I was going to take, however, fate had a different plan.

During my senior year of college, I was invited to consider membership in the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. The oldest of the Black Greek letter organizations, the Alpha men were always seen as leaders on campus, and were held in high regard by the university administration and the community as a whole. I officially joined the fraternity in 1995, and once again, was almost immediately bolstered to a leadership position. It was through the fraternity, a desire grew within me to do more for the community in which I lived, and to serve as a role model for our youth.

Not long following graduation, I was appointed by the state alumni president to serve as an Area Director. As an AD, I was directly responsible for all fraternal activity within the geographical areas under my direction. Being or becoming a leader in Alpha is sort of a "rites of passage" that is primarily reserved for older and more seasoned (experienced) brothers, but the elders as I call them, saw something in me that I quite frankly didn't know I possessed. I served the State of Texas delegation in that capacity for over ten years, and during that time, I learned many valuable lessons about leadership and how to lead leaders.

My mother and Mr. Polk constantly encouraged me to pursue teacher certification while in college and while I knew (at the time) that I was not interested in becoming a teacher, I am very thankful today that I listened. As I was set to complete college and graduate, circumstances arose that would have prevented me from doing so. Fortunately, Mr. Polk was being promoted to assistant principal of the high school I attended and he wanted to ensure that one of his former students replaced him as the Ag teacher, and as luck would have it, I was the only one available. To make a long story short, in a matter of hours I went from being faced with leaving college a semester short of graduation, to being offered a teaching position and graduating early. I actually graduated on a Saturday morning, and was standing before students as a teacher the following Monday.

I have literally walked in the path of Raymond Polk since I was in the 9th grade. He was largely the reason I went to college. He was the reason I was offered a position as a teacher, and he ensured that I was successful as such. He was the reason I returned to school to pursue and earn a Master's Degree in education as he simply gave me no option. Mr. Polk was the reason that after only four years in the classroom, I pursued and secured an assistant principal position, and he has remained a mentor, confidant, support, and friend throughout all of this time.

After leaving the nest so to speak, to assume the role of assistant principal, leaving a rural setting and entering an urban suburban setting, I faced challenges that I had not before. However, one of the benefits of teaching where I attended was that along with Mr. Polk, I worked alongside many teachers that had once served as my



teacher, and all were intent upon my being successful. The words of one of those teachers proved very helpful with my mindset given the change of setting, and those words were "...kids are kids wherever you go. They all need the same thing, love".

If I were asked to identify the job or position I have enjoyed the most thus far in my career, I would easily say it was my principalship. As a principal I embraced the opportunity I had to be an impactful figure on the entire school, as well as the community and all of its stakeholders. I never viewed my experience any less than a major opportunity, and the greatest responsibility of my career to date. The consistency of commitment I learned earlier and at different stages in my life, served me well in the most challenging position in the field of education by all accounts with the exception being the Superintendency. However, I have come to view both positions in close parallel, in fact; they are the only leadership position in any school district that parallels each other.

Nonetheless, my principalship and the success of the school I lead are my most treasured professional moments. It was where I realized and was provided insight into what my next ordered step will be, which is to assume the role of superintendent of a large urban school district at some point. Much like an athletic coach, I worked tirelessly and in a spirited manner when I was a principal. Never a day did I dread going to work and the connections I established with students, staff, parents, and community stakeholders have proven meaningful and lasting.

By this point in my career I have had the opportunity to touch or affect the lives of thousands of people in some way form or fashion. Whether it be a chance encounter,

or a social media message, from a former student, colleague, or friend, the response is greatly humbling and totally honoring. I cannot provide one singular aspect of success that we earned during my tenure as principal because it was the collective impact of all that we accomplished, from test scores to academic competition to extracurricular accomplishment, we simply led it all. I walk a little taller, speak a little stronger, and lead a little better following that experience; the experience of knowing you made a difference in someone's life is simply priceless.

I have served and have experienced success as a teacher, and as an urban assistant principal, principal, area superintendent, and now as an assistant superintendent over the past 21 years, and my desire to serve has only grown. My thirst to do it better and better, and wholehearted acceptance of this path of life grows richer and stronger every day. Over the years I've learned to identify and capitalize on opportunities for kids, to navigate political avenues and pitfalls that may curtail academic success. Through my experiences of establishing systems to provide and support instruction, hiring and supporting teachers and school administrators, maintaining fiscal responsibility, and serving as a role model for the students, parents, and communities I've served, I truly embrace the responsibility and the impact I can have in the lives of many. Leadership to me is not synonymous with authority or power. Leadership means responsibility to me, and I have worked by the theme of many are called but few are chosen since I realized and accepted the field of education as my calling. I may never truly know why I was chosen for this, the greatest profession one can be called to, but I

know that I must continue to strive to be a steward of scholarship, fellowship, good character, and the uplifting of humanity.

I believe myself to be a servant leader, and my personal goal is to be an ongoing “servant to all” entrusted to me and the “responsibility” that holds. I hope that the outcome of this study in conjunction with my experiences will prove beneficial for all that aspire to assume the role of superintendent of schools. I’ve had a bird's eye view of how to run a school system, and I have led a high performing and widely recognized urban school as a principal. I accept and embrace the role of educator with the same fervor and commitment that I have as a husband and father, which is unending and limitless. Teaching is not just what I do, it's who I am.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The administrative role of the superintendent has been the central focus in the field of education throughout the years with most studies primarily focused on European American males and their experiences (Shakeshaft, 1989). However, research has increased in the volume of literature defining leadership through an examination of character traits and attributes associated with the position of superintendent (CGCS, 2010).

While there exists a considerable accumulation of literature regarding leadership examining character traits and qualities associated with effective leadership, and while the number of African American male superintendents across the nation has grown, their stories have been lacking in the research. Their voices can inform and apprise others about aspects of leadership in education from their perspective which can provide a

unique and clearer understanding of the construction of leader persona and the manner in which one leads an urban school district toward achieving academic success.

As diverse populations increase in today's schools, it has become crucially necessary to broaden the lens in which the superintendency is viewed, particularly by including the voices of African American male superintendents (CGCS, 2010). Further, the verbalization of personal insight concerning character enables individuals to consider their inner values, beliefs, and leadership styles, which is of utmost importance (Wesson, 1998).

Research intended to provide insight to the personal and professional characteristics and attributes of male superintendents in diverse school districts is clearly needed. Therefore, this study I have attempted to expand and increase the volume of voices and stories of the experiences of four African American male superintendents from across the nation who can inform others about important issues of leadership in diverse urban school districts.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine and interpret the life experiences and leadership practices of four African American male superintendents leading urban school districts across the nation. The quantity of specific studies regarding African American males and the superintendency is limited, and this study is intended to expand the voices of African American male superintendents, inform African American males that aspire to the position of superintendent, as well as encourage African American males that currently serve in the position of urban school district superintendent.

## **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to provide insights to educators about African American male superintendents in diverse settings. . African American male educators who desire to become superintendents, particularly in urban settings, may benefit from this research by gaining insight from sitting African American superintendents of diverse school districts, and those incumbents may also benefit from reflection on their practices and experiences as well as those of their peers.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine and (re) interpret (Dillard, 1995, 2012) the life experiences and leadership practices of four African American male superintendents' in diverse urban school districts across the nation. The following questions will serve as guides for the study:

1. How do African American male superintendents in urban school districts describe their identities?
2. How do African American male superintendents describe being a leader in an urban Public School District?
3. How do African American male superintendents in urban school districts describe their acts of equity leadership related to student outcomes?

## **Definitions of Terms**

**African American or Black** – An African American is a member of an ethnic group in the United States whose ancestors, usually in predominant part, were indigenous to Africa. The majority of African Americans are the descendants of enslaved Africans

transported via slave ships following the sea route known as the Middle passage from West and Central Africa to North America and the Caribbean from 1565 through 1807 during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2012).

**Diverse School District** - According to the United States Department of the Interior's Office of Civil Rights, the term diversity is used broadly to refer to many demographic variables, including, but not limited to, race, religion, color, gender, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, education, geographic origin, and skill characteristics.

**Leadership Styles** - Leadership styles can include transformational, visionary, facilitative, instructional, and community. All are valued, but for this study, leadership for student learning and achievement is the priority that connects and encompasses all leadership styles (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

**Majority** - This portion of the population consists of members that make-up over half of the population. It is a group having power or representation relative to other groups within society. It may also be considered an advantaged racial or ethnic group. For the purpose of this study, European American Americans have been considered majority.

**People of Color** - A member of a disadvantaged racial and ethnic group. For the purpose of this dissertation, Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans have been labeled as minorities (Valverde & Brown, 1988).

**Principal** - Administrator in charge of individual schools (Thomas B. Fordham, 2003).

**Race/Ethnicity:** The concept of race used by the Census Bureau (2013) includes self identification with five minimum categories: European Americans, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other

Pacific Islander. People who may identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race.

**School Board:** Local boards of education are created by state statutes for the purposes of administering local school districts. They are legally the governing body for the school district; they can act only as a body; individually, members have no power; primary responsibilities are goal setting and policy making. The boards derive their powers from the state constitution, statutes, and court decisions (Kritsonis, 2002).

**School District** – A geographical area, that is generally connected with a legally established municipality, where the student population may be high in number, and which has been designated as a local school unit, often by state authority, to be governed by a local School Board in terms of power and duties delegated by the state.

**Stakeholder** - typically refers to anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives. Stakeholders may also be collective entities, such as local businesses, organizations, advocacy groups, committees, media outlets, and cultural institutions, in addition to organizations that represent specific groups, such as teachers' unions, parent-teacher organizations, and associations representing superintendents, principals, school boards, or teachers in specific academic disciplines.

**Superintendent** – The chief executive officer of a public school district, who is charged under the Board of Education, with all the aspects of a school district's day to day

operations which center on providing instructional, organizational, and community-wide leadership to the school district (Clisbee, 2004).

**Urban** - of, relating to, or designating an inner city or town.

**Urban Intensive Schools** - Schools that are concentrated in large, metropolitan cities across the United States, such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta

**Urban Emergent Schools** - These schools are those that are typically located in large cities but not as large as the major cities. They typically have some of the same characteristics and sometimes challenges as urban intensive schools and districts in terms of resources, qualification of teachers, and academic development of students.

**Urban Characteristic Schools** - These schools are those that are not located in big cities but may be beginning to experience increases in challenges that are sometimes associated with urban contexts such as an increase in English language learners in a community.

**Voices** – Framework of in depth expressions of one’s way of knowing. Voices include life experiences (personal and professional experiences) which may be expression of one’s values, beliefs, needs, and concerns.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Prior to the landmark case of Brown versus the Board of Education, little research on African American superintendents existed, and it wasn't until the 1970s that African American superintendents gained exposure as a subject of study (Taylor & Tillman, 2009). Specific information detailing the number of African American superintendents prior to the 1970's is vague, and accounts that can be found usually are categorized as "women and minorities" (Tillman, 2004).

Inclusion, both as students as well as educators, has not been easy for African Americans historically, and while conditions have improved due primarily to situational necessity, African Americans continue to fight for equality and representation in today's schools. Whether serving as classroom teachers or assuming the role of the chief executive officer of a school system, their struggle remains a major concern despite the growing diversity within the schools (Gregory, 2006). However, Tillman (2004) notes that as the African American student population has increased in school districts, the demand for African American school superintendents has increased as well.

Educational reformers have claimed for some time that school leadership is a vital component to education reform efforts, second only to actual teaching (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Gay (2010) asserts that culturally responsive teaching is important, but of equal importance is the reformation and transformation of all aspects of education including administration, so they are also culturally responsive as that has yet

to occur firmly in the field of educational leadership (as cited in Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

### **Historical Context**

From the late 1800's to the early 1900's, the notion of the superintendent as a teacher-scholar was prevalent, and the aim was to "have a person work full time supervising classroom instruction and assuring uniformity of curriculum" (Spring, 1990, p. 141). According to Cuban (1976, p.15), an 1890 report summarized the superintendent by the following characterization: "It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils".

### **Superintendent As Teacher Scholar**

During the time of about 1865 to 1910, male teachers considered to be effective were selected for this position and functioned as lead educators under the direction of board members but in a supervisory role of principals and teachers (Kowalski, 2006; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Despite their position as the governing body, some boards of small schools were reluctant to hire superintendents as they feared losing political power in the community (Kowalski, 2006; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Conversely, superintendents in large city districts were widely referred to as scholars and often ascended to the positions of state superintendents, professors, and even college presidents because they exhibited expertise on topics such as

philosophy, history, and pedagogy through their contributions to scholarly publications (Cuban, 1988). Prior to this time, there were no academic degrees offered in educational administration nor were there courses offered intended for such (Cubberley, 1924; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Eventually, a few courses were created at Teachers College, Columbia University, allowing professors to seize the opportunity to develop a specialization separate from and superior to teaching (Callahan, 1962; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014).

### **Superintendent As Business Manager**

Around 1910 and thereafter, the perception of the superintendent as a business manager emerged resulting in many school boards placing greater emphasis on a superintendent's managerial skills than on his or her teaching skills (Kowalski, 2006; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). This new perception of the superintendent as a business manager led to the identity of the role of the superintendent as being authoritative, impersonal, and needing to be driven by a task oriented set of values and beliefs (Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014).

As history has shown, schools have primarily been composed of closed environments encouraging teachers and administrators to work seclusively (Gideon, 2002). Using the classical communication model of "top-down management", negative effects on employee commitment, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness are negatively impacted in environments such as this (Gideon, 2002). Further, and of equal importance, environments such as this lead to ineffective

communication, which also impacted perceptions of administrator effectiveness (Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980; Snavely & Walters, 1983).

### **Superintendent As Statesman**

New ideas regarding the governance of schools and school administration emerged following World War II, the Great Depression, and the stock market crash. Post World War II conditions resulted in demographic changes, an increased number of school age children, and a need for the creation of new school districts in newly established areas (Callahan, 1962; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Population growth and economic conditions of the time facilitated a need to consolidate schools to capitalize on combined resources. While democratic localism allowed citizens to actively engage in debate and influence policy, most citizens neither had the time nor expertise to engage in the policy making process which facilitated a need for a cultural political shift (Callahan, 1962; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). As a result, the concept of representative democracy was born; hence the role of the superintendent as statesman emerged and was anchored in the concept of democratic administration (Callahan, 1962; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014).

As a statesman, the superintendent assumed responsibility with political implications and was expected to garner support for education (Howlett, 1993; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Ernest Melby (1955) identified the community as public education's greatest resource, and urged administrators to "release the creative capacities of individuals" while "mobilizing the educational resources of communities." In order to staff positions, superintendents who possessed "a greater sensitivity to large

social problems through an interdisciplinary approach involving most of the social sciences” (Kellogg Foundation, 1961, p.13) were highly pursued.

### **Superintendent As Applied Social Scientist**

Considered an applied social scientist, superintendents were depended upon to elucidate education problems characteristic of a multicultural, democratic society by relying on empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty (Cooper & Boyd, 1987; Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Boyd, 1999; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). During the 1960’s and 1970’s doctoral students in educational administration were required to complete courses in the behavioral sciences such as psychology, economics, political science or sociology (Kowalski, 2009; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014).

School leaders are currently called upon to lead culturally responsive efforts and are tasked with promoting a school climate inclusive of diverse student populations with emphasis on those marginalized within most school contexts (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Additionally, district leaders must establish a presence in, and maintain relationships with, the communities they serve (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Further, leaders must provide professional development to ensure teachers and staff, and the curriculum, are responsive to the needs of diverse student populations. Essentially, as population demographics continuously change, so must leadership practices necessary to respond to the needs that accompany these shifts (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

## **Superintendent As CEO**

Superintendents serve as CEO of the district and manages its day-to-day affairs (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). As the CEO of the school district, superintendents are responsible for ensuring that legislated mandates, policies and regulations are implemented properly in addition to providing oversight and support to local schools (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Their duties include advising the board of education on education and policy matters; making recommendations to the board regarding personnel hiring; ensuring compliance with directives of state and federal authorities; preparing district budgets for board review and adoption; leading long-range planning activities; and providing oversight of instructional programs and student performance (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014).

Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis (2016) assert that today's urban superintendent must exercise critical self-awareness whereby leaders must have an awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it came to serving diverse urban school populations. In addition, district leaders must use their understanding to envision and establish learning environments to address the needs of students marginalized because of race and class (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Superintendents must be keenly aware of factors of inequity that negatively affect students' potential, and they must be willing to identify and address personal assumptions about race and culture that impact the school organization (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

## **Significant Research Studies**

Throughout the last century there have been several research studies conducted on the school superintendent, with the majority of the earlier work conducted through the Department of Superintendence, a division of the National Education Association (NEA), and primarily for the purpose of assembling demographic profiles, insights on key educational issues, and what comprised “best practices” in the superintendency (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). According to Kowalski, et al, (2011) in a 2010 Decennial Study entitled *The American School Superintendent*, beginning in 1923 and approximately every 10 years thereafter, research regarding the school superintendent has been expanded upon. Studies published in 1952 and 1960 were created through collaborative efforts of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the research division of the NEA. However, following the 1971 study, the AASA became the sole sponsor of the work. The table below (Table 1) provides a list of studies by decade.

***Table 1: Decade Studies of the Superintendency***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>
1923	The Status of the Superintendent in 1923	Charles E. Chadsey
1933	Educational Leadership	Not Listed
1952	The American School Superintendency (30th Yearbook)	Not Listed
1960	Profile of The School Superintendent	Not Listed
1971	The American School Superintendent	Stephen J. Knezevich
1982	The American School Superintendent	Luvern L. Cunningham & Joseph Hentges
1992	The Study of the American School Superintendency	Thomas Glass
2000	The Study of the American School Superintendency	Thomas Glass, Lars Bjork, & C. Cryss Brunner
2010	The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study	Theodore Kowalski, Robert McCord, George Petersen, I. Phillip Young, & Noelle Ellerson

While each differs in content, all studies provide a definition of the position, description of persons holding the position, and provide an analysis of the roles the person holding the position of superintendent must assume (Kowalski et al, (2011). Content differences were dictated by social, economic, and environmental issues present during each time period. For instance, the 1933 study, Educational Leadership, focused on the role of public schools in the revitalization of economic and social growth.

As stated earlier, this time period following the great depression called for superintendents to assume the role of statesman and with that came the responsibility to address societal issues through the educational process (Callahan, 1962). Likewise, as urbanization began to take form and industry began to take root, emphasis began to be placed on the differences between what was needed, desired, and expected of the urban



superintendent in contrast to that of the rural superintendent as depicted in *The American School Superintendency* (30th Yearbook), 1952 edition. While the 1960 study, *Profile of The School Superintendent*, highlighted aspects and criteria regarding superintendent preparation, the 1971 study and subsequent efforts have included a primary focus on characteristics of the position, the individuals holding the position, and the districts that employ superintendents.

### **Geographic Distinction**

Over the years, inaccurate perceptions have arisen regarding the length of tenure of superintendents (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (2010-11) indicated that of approximately 14,000 school districts in the United States, 57 percent were located in rural areas, while 20 percent of districts were located in suburban areas, with the remaining 23 percent in towns and cities (Institute for Education Sciences, 2013). Approximately one-third of the nearly 100,000 U. S. public schools were located in rural areas (32,000), more than in suburbs (27,000), cities (26,000), or towns (14,000) according to 2010-11 statistics.

Despite the larger number of schools, a lower number of students were enrolled in public schools in rural areas. Public schools in rural areas enrolled 12 million students, representing 24 percent of total enrollment, compared with 17 million in suburban areas (34 percent of enrollment) and 14 million in cities (29 percent of enrollment) (Institute for Education Sciences, 2013).

A 2006 study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators reported that the mean tenure of superintendents was 5 to 6 years with an annual attrition

rate of 14- 16 percent. Urban districts saw an increase in the length of tenure from 2.8 years in 2003, to 3.6 years in 2010. Modest growth by most standards, but given the relatively small number of large urban districts in comparison to the substantially greater number of smaller rural districts, the numbers tend to be misleading.

Prior to 1954, and preceding the Brown v. Board of Education case, African Americans constituted what some considered given the times, a liberal representation of leaders in the superintendency as most were employed in southern, rurally segregated areas. However, the number of African Americans serving in the capacity of superintendent declined substantially after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the “separate but equal” doctrine unconstitutional (Collier, 1987). Kowalski (2006, p. 231) asserts that the superintendency rate of African Americans had been “shamefully small” even prior to the Brown case. The National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) reported in 2011 that of the approximately 13,893 school districts in the US, only 361 or 2.5% of superintendents were African American, and of the 361 individuals, 253 were males; a microscopic number when compared to European Americans who comprised 94% of those employed in the position.

### **Education in Urban Areas**

Education in urban areas is filled with challenges. Discussions of urban context is inclusive of social problems, poverty, and structural racism. Urban education routinely refers to schools geographically located within urban areas (Beachum, McCray, & Huang, 2010). In the current academic context, the stakes for providing quality educational for K-12 schools are outstandingly high (Beachum, McCray, & Huang,

2010). Relentless testing, increasingly high standards, and expectations for greater accountability are pervasive (Beachum, McCray, & Huang, 2010). While all schools must face these pressures, urban schools must also contend with socio-economic difficulties that constrain, control, and dictate their possibilities (Beachum, McCray, & Huang, 2010). Scholars have identified the importance of leadership at all levels, central office, campus principal, and classroom teachers, as necessary but often entail conflict which deter the attainment of organizational goals (Beachum, McCray, & Huang, 2010). “For urban schools there must be a healthy medium between administration and teachers which can optimize organizational effectiveness, student learning, and leadership capacity” (Beachum, McCray, & Huang, 2010).

Evidence increases to indicate that school leaders cannot afford to serve in a singular fashion as sole decision makers, and/or gatekeepers of power. According to Heenan and Bennis, with increased need for interdependence and endless technological advancements, “even the greatest of Great Men or Women simply can’t get the job done alone” (Heenan & Bennis, 1999 as cited in Beachum, McCray, & Huang, 2010). Consequently, the concept of leadership must be rethought. Beachum and Dentith (2004) assert that leadership models and practices that facilitate the leadership capacities of others must be developed. “School leaders have to build more collaborative and democratic arrangements with teachers and others to achieve the enormous ambitions of schooling and respond to students’ diverse needs” (Beachum & Dentith, 2004).

## **Historical Context of African American Superintendents**

The quantity of specific studies regarding African American males and the superintendency mirrors that of the number of individuals employed in the position, and that is to say that there are fewer than one might expect. The limited research on the subject, while rich, provides a challenge in extending the topic and providing a historical perspective. It is believed that the first larger district, urban African American superintendents were appointed in and around 1956 (Jones, 1983). According to NABSE (1999), Lillard Ashley of Boley, Oklahoma (1956), Arthur Shropshire of Kinloch, Missouri (1963), E.W. Warrior of Taft, Oklahoma (1958) and Lorenzo R. Smith of Hopkins Park, Illinois (1956) were among the first African American males appointed.

During the 1970's African American superintendents began to be appointed to urban school districts in larger number, and like today, that role came with higher expectations and implications for providing greater hope for the African American community (Jackson, 1995). These individuals were typically appointed to urban districts riddled with severe challenges precluded by inadequate financial resources and well-developed reservoirs of unmet needs (Scott, 1980). Student populations consisted of higher enrollment of African American students, and most all students regardless of race, from socioeconomically disadvantaged environments (Scott, 1980). Poor school performance and declining student achievement led to predominant community skepticism regarding the schools (Moody, 1983).

The current status of education in the United States calls for leadership for social justice in urban school systems across the nation to combat the ill effects urban

characteristics have in schools (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Of serious concern for educational practitioners and scholars alike, social justice is impacted by a growing diversity of school age populations (Goddard, 2005), advancing data collection techniques regarding learning gaps among diverse student populations (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004), and discerning investigation of pervasive deficit thinking that resides within school policies and programs intended to transcend these concerns (Furman, 2012). Leaders of social justice, superintendents, must persistently assess the equity in instruction provided to all students while supporting critical review of teachers to identify and gain understanding regarding their practice in order to address any biases regardless of gender, class, or race (Kose, 2007). “It follows from these understandings that leadership for social justice involves identifying and undoing these oppressive and unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable, culturally appropriate ones” (Furman, 2012). As stated by Dantley and Tillman (2010), leadership for social justice “investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities” (p. 20), which is a tall order for public school superintendents to fulfil.

### **African American Male Leaders in Education**

#### ***Charles Moody***

Moody (1970), widely considered a leading authority on the topic of African American superintendents, provided the earliest, and perhaps most significant study of the topic. Moody began his career as a teacher, and in 1968 he became superintendent of the Harvey, Illinois Public Schools, later joining the education faculty of the University of Michigan in 1970. The work of this pioneer featured an analysis of twenty-one public

school systems in the United States and was the seminal work leading to his doctorate at Northwestern University.

Moody's study entitled: *Black Superintendents in Public School Districts: Trends and Conditions*, was the first such study in the United States, and Moody's 1970 dissertation on black superintendents resulted in the formation of the National Alliance of Black School Superintendents. Moody, whose research was grant funded by the Metropolitan Applied Research Corporation (MARC), found that in order for an African American to receive selection to the superintendency, the school district had to be comprised of a majority African American board of education, a majority non-European American student population, and a majority non-European American community population (Moody, 1983). The need for increasing the number of African American leaders to the position of superintendent transcends the problem of under-representation (Grogan & Henry, 1995; Moody, 1983; & Ortiz, 1998). While individual achievement is important, future benefits include the potential for Black administrators to contribute to the improvement of educational opportunities for diverse student populations (Braddom, 1988). Moody stated, "When one is in a struggle or battle, he looks around to see if he is alone. This human characteristic was one of the underlying factors in the formation of the National Alliance of Black School Superintendents" (Moody, 1983). The National Alliance of Black School Superintendents eventually changed its name to what is now known as the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), and has over 6,000 members in 125 affiliates across the United States (NABSE, 2016).

### ***Alonzo Crim***

Alonzo Crim served as Atlanta Public Schools (APS) superintendent from 1973 until 1988. Crim was the superintendent of a school district in California at the time he was invited to assume the leadership role over Atlanta's public school system, thus becoming the first Black superintendent ever hired by a large Southern school system (Pace, 2000). Crim was appointed superintendent of APS in fulfillment of a school desegregation settlement that stipulated that at least 50% of district administrators were to be Black and the district was required to hire an African American to fill the role of superintendent. Crim was very influential in helping to build the foundation for urban education in the Atlanta area (Pace, 2000).

In a community where power was split between blacks and whites, Crim took over an Atlanta schools system that was in disarray. With standards declining, teachers and students being shuffled about for racial reasons, and an institutional structure that was disintegrating, Crim endeavored to establish stability, accepted goals and academic standards, and advancement as measured by those goals and standards (Pace, 2000). By 1986, APS student performance levels were higher than the national average in basic skills, school attendance had increased to greater than 90 percent, and the district graduation rate rose to more than 70% (Pace, 2000)

A graduate of Roosevelt College, Crim earned an undergraduate degree in Sociology, obtained a Master's degree in Education from University of Chicago, and earned his doctorate in Educational administration from Harvard University in 1969. Crim retired from the Atlanta Public School System in 1988 after providing 15 years of

dynamic leadership and service to APS. He later served as a Professor of Education at Georgia State University where he established the Chair of the Benjamin E. Mays (renowned educator and Board President of APS at the time of Crim's appointment as superintendent) Professor of Urban Leadership. Both men were committed to a philosophy of requiring excellence in the education of those typically least well-served by the larger society.

### ***The Council of Great City Schools***

The Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), a national coalition comprised of 65 of the largest urban school systems in the United States, has as its mission to assist and advocate for urban public schools and their improvement (CGCS, 2014). The CGCS provides services and support to its members regarding legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The districts that make up the Council serve approximately 7.2 million of America's 48.7 million K-12 students, and approximately one-third of the nation's students identified as at risk (CGCS, 2014).

In an effort to identify statistical characteristics of school superintendents for the 2009-2010 school year, the GCCS conducted a survey of its member districts. Information collected in the survey included gender, race/ethnicity, salary, benefits, bonuses, and work experience of each district's superintendent. While not all member districts reported, results from respondents representing 86% of the total membership showed as follows: approximately 47 % of superintendents identified themselves as European Americans, 41 % as African American, and 11 % as Hispanic; results very similar to data collected in 1999 where 42 % of respondents identified themselves as



European Americans, 43 % as African American, and 15 % as Hispanic. Additionally, some 74 % of CGCS superintendents were men, of which 38 % were European Americans males, 27 % were African American males, and 9 % were Hispanic males. It is clear, that even in a smaller subset of school districts across the nation, disparity exists regarding racial or ethnic diversity within the superintendency even in large urban school districts.

### **Personal Characteristics of Successful Superintendents**

The qualities of vision, integrity, humility, and commitment are just a few of the traits identified by Vargo (2005) that individuals must possess in order to be considered successful in the superintendency. “Visionary leadership, the communication of a future image of a collective with the intention to persuade others to contribute to its realization”, is largely viewed as an exceptional method of mobilizing and motivating followers (Van Knippenberg & Stam, 2012). The leader sets the course through his or vision (Van Knippenberg & Stam, 2012).

Integrity, or professional conduct, is a character trait that focuses on what a person does, and how he or she does it (Banks, 2010). Educational leaders must have the capacity to be reflective of their work, not only with colleagues and employers, but with themselves as well (Banks, 2010). The work of superintendents must be plausible and credible (Banks, 2010).

Webster’s dictionary defines humility as the quality or state of being humble. Ross (2010) asserts that school leaders must possess “cultural humility”. Not only must the superintendent be of humble heart, he must also apply a dynamic of on-going self-

reflection to identify any patterns of favoritism or racism, unintentionally towards those he leads (Ross, 2010).

Commitment emphasizes an adherence to a set of professional values based on what motivates a person to do this work, or what a person believes in, and what a person values (Banks, 2010). A person's commitment is exemplified in his or her actions, and communicates where a person's priorities lie (Banks, 2010).

The search for an exceptional superintendent often begins with a definition, and most school district boards describe the type of leader they would like representing their district using common traits as evidenced by reviewing search criteria of districts around the country (Boring, 2001). These traits include organizational ambition applied with personal humility in acknowledging and recognizing success in others while taking responsibility in times of failure (Vargo, 2005); exemplifying effective teamwork, mobilizing and utilizing human and tangible resources in pursuit of goals, inspiring vision of committed support, mentoring and growing future leaders to build and sustain a high performing workforce, and a sense of perseverance regarding achievement of the district (Vargo, 2005).

Additional characteristics thematically include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and an ability to establish, manage, and maintain relationships (Boring, 2001). Further, the effective leader is seen as having a diverse managerial skillset that allows he or she to respond to various management styles in appropriate situations to promote the organization's performance, all while maintaining unimpeachable moral character (Vargo, 2005).

## **Factors of Successful African American Superintendents**

In addition to general characteristics that apply to all superintendents, Moody (1982) asserts additional considerations that are unique to African American superintendents. Moody found of particular consideration is (1) the individual's ability to "fit" into a particular school district, (2) competence level, (3) diverse background and experience, (4) connections within various organizations, (5) one's ability to effect change, (6) mobility or willingness to move, (7) high career aspirations, and (8) educational leadership ability, all to be key factors leading to the success of African American superintendents.

Bush and Bush (2013) introduced an African American Male Theory (AAMT) as a framework to describe the status and outlook for the African American male superintendent. Applying the African American Male model provides a frame in which to capture the spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development of the participants included in this study (Bush & Bush, 2013).

African American Male Theory has as its foundation, six tenets which are; (1) the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectory of African American boy's and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach; (2) there is something unique about being male and of African descent; (3) there is continuity and continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influence the experiences of African American boys and men; (4) African American boys and men are resilient and resistant; (5) race and racism coupled with classism and sexism have a profound impact on every aspect of the lives of

African American boys and men; (6) the focus and purpose of study and programs concerning African American boys and men should be the pursuit of social justice (Bush & Bush, 2013).

AAMT scholars encourage the examination of what causes African boys and men to be resilient, healthy and why they thrive (Bush & Bush, 2013). AAMT also provides an authentic, native, and sound foundation and framework for future research to be approached in social and physical sciences and practices in other fields (Bush & Bush, 2013).

### **Effective Educational Leadership**

Effective district leadership begins with vision, and an effective superintendent has a clear vision for their district (CGCS, 2011). A clear vision means that the superintendent knows what an effective school district looks like. He or she works with the board of trustees to set the vision, goals and objectives for the district, and then sees to it that the goals are achieved. As it relates to effective educational leadership, a study conducted by MDRC, released in 2002 and commissioned by the Council of the Great City Schools, found that a shared district vision was key for the more successful urban districts, and student achievement was identified as the highest priority as well as a focus on achievable goals. “Effective superintendents,” according to Mike Kirst (1993), have a mental picture of what good instruction is and knows how to execute programs that will improve teaching and learning. Thus, an effective superintendent is an instructional leader. He or she knows that the most important job of the school district is to make sure students are learning and achieving at high levels (Kirst, 1993). The superintendent must

be knowledgeable of the best instructional practices for maximizing student achievement and is supportive of teachers in their district. Leadership style, while important, is not directly linked to district or school performance, however it is certainly an aspect of effective educational leadership that can be applied in various ways (Kirst, 1993).

There have been studies regarding the relevance of physical attributes such as, height, weight, eye color, and overall physical appearance, yet no significant result was found to have an impact on effective educational leadership (Gregory, 2006). While such study may sound outlandish, physical characteristics such as gender and race have been shown to be significant factors in determining the effectiveness of educational leaders, at least in terms of perception (Gregory, 2006). Most adults, and likely current students, can or should be able to identify at least one teacher of positive significance for them. While that teacher was a male for me, more often than not, individual responses would be that of a female teacher, and for good reason. Females are, and have been the predominant gender in education historically, thus they have lead and taught the majority of the population (Clisbee, 2005). Likewise, if one were to be asked that same question regarding their principal, the answer historically is more likely to reveal males as they have had a longer history of being employed in the position (Clisbee, 2005).

If the question were asked in terms of race, specifically related to males, responses would overwhelmingly have to result as identifying White men as they have been the predominate individual in the position of both school and district leadership throughout history. Inequality and exclusionary practices provide a tainted perception of the African American male as somehow less able to perform the duties of the

educational leader, and while many have succeeded in disproving this myth, the underwhelming volume of evidence prevails to the contrary (Jones, 1983).

Effective educational leaders have a strong belief in the value of all children and a keen sense of mission to raise student achievement (CGCS, 2011).

### **Role of the Superintendent**

Superintendents of diverse school districts have arguably the most important and challenging jobs in America's education system (CGCS, 2009, 2014). In order to understand the way one leads, it is important to understand, "something about the developmental pathways those leaders have traveled" (Curry, 2000, p. 21). The post of superintendent of schools emerged during the late 1830s, and by 1850, 13 large city school districts had an administrator employed in this position (Grieder, Pierce, & Jordan, 1969; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014).

The need for school systems to have a top executive in place expanded quickly, and by 1900, most city school districts had implemented the position. Factors necessitating the need for the position ranged from a number of conditions including the evolution of larger city school districts, the consolidation of rural school districts, increasing curriculum requirements, school attendance laws, need for greater accountability, and organizational efficiency desires (Kowalski, 2003; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014);). At the onset of the creation of the position of superintendent until the first decade of the twentieth century, the main function of district superintendents was to ensure implementation of the state curriculum and to supervise teachers (Kowalski, 1999). The mandates of the common school movement

were to incorporate students into American culture through the delivery of standardized subjects courses of study, which was a strategy that required centralized control. State, county, and district superintendents were assigned to shepherd the process (Kowalski, 1999).

At the conclusion of the Civil War, urban school systems expanded quickly requiring the need for standardization of public education, and their superintendents were considered to be master teachers (Callahan, 1962). Superintendents devoted much of their time with instructional and curricular supervision (Spring, 1994). Additionally, these individuals often contributed to professional journals, submitting articles about philosophy, history, and pedagogy (Cuban, 1988), resulting in some being promoted to state superintendents, professors, and college presidents (Petersen & Barnett, 2003).

The approximate time period of 1900 to 1920, witnessed leading education scholars merge with political elites in demanding that school administrators employ principles of scientific management (Cronin, 1973; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). This new perception of the superintendent as a business manager led to the identity of the role of the superintendent as being authoritative (Cronin, 1973; Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). As pressures rose surrounding the transformation of their role, university officials began to offer courses leading to graduate degrees in school management. Reluctantly, superintendents began to reevaluate the value of defending their public image as professional educators, and many decided to accept the idea that policymakers and the general public viewed administrative work as separate from and more important than teaching (Thomas & Moran, 1992).

Limited financial resources led school leaders to get more involved in political matters, particularly through representatives at the legislative level. Prior to this time, superintendents that involved themselves in politics to this level were deemed unprofessional (Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Kowalski, 1995). However, those perceptions changed when it became clear that schools were in direct competition with other entities for support and funding from the government.

Around the same time, a contingency of notable professors engaged in efforts to restore participatory democracy in local districts facilitating the view of the superintendent as that of a statesman (Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Kowalski, 1995). Of a cadre of scholars operating in support of the concept, the most outspoken of its members, Ernest Melby, a former dean of education at Northwestern University and New York University (Callahan, 1966), believed that the infusion of business values from the earlier period had led district leaders to become less reliant on their greatest resource: the community (Melby, 1955). However, by the mid-1950s, the concept of superintendents engaging in democratic administration met with disfavor but has reemerged due to a combination of developing values and economic realities in education (Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Kowalski, 1995).

Marcia (1993) states that the goals, values, and beliefs of an individual exposes and leads to the evolution of their leadership persona. Thus, the identification of the role of the superintendent as both a social scientist, as well as a communicator, have evolved of the past 50 years in response to societal expectations due primarily to the view of role superintendents play in addressing societal issues in an expanding technological



environment where the opportunity to communicate is readily available via a myriad of different avenues (Kowalski, 2003).

The current era of the superintendency employs a greater emphasis on accountability and standards, while including the foundational premise of every previous role stated within this study. Superintendents are tasked with providing transparent yet rapid improvement in academic achievement under extreme conditions (Kowalski, et al, 2011). They must ensure quality teaching and learning in their schools, and unite all stakeholders behind a clear and uniform vision of instructional purpose (Kowalski, et al, 2011).

Today's superintendent is expected to be the leader of education in the community, and guide educational advancement and change within the systems they lead. Often times, the local school district is the largest and most complex organization in the community in which it is situated (Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). The role of superintendent requires that he or she balance the desires of parents and taxpayers, staff and community, political interests, and religious or secular interests while simultaneously representing the district as the chief spokesperson as the most visible figure within (Kowalski, et al, 2011).

Fiedler's contingency model suggests that there is no single best way for managers to lead (Ellyson, Gibson, Nichols, & Doerr, 2012). Rather, a leader's effectiveness is based on the situation which result from two factors – "leadership style" and "situational control" (Bolden et. al., 2003; Ellyson, Gibson, Nichols, & Doerr, 2012). The position of superintendent requires that the individual navigate the avenues

between the school board that sets policy for the district and the professionals that must enact and abide by those policies (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Ultimately, however, the superintendent must perform the duties and responsibilities required of the position as prescribed by the governing bodies at all levels of the hierarchical structure of the geographical location in of which the district they lead is located (Merrins, 2010).

The primary authority to which the superintendent is accountable is the local board (Boring, 2001) . However, the relations and actionable functions of the superintendent and their board is unique in that, while the superintendent is accountable to the board; informing the board about school programs, practices and problems, they must also offer professional guidance on items requiring Board action, with appropriate recommendations based on thorough study and analysis (Merrins, 2010).

Additionally, the superintendent informs the Board and staff of new developments and significant events in the field of education (Wayland, 2010). The all-encompassing goal of the superintendent is ultimately to manage the school system and to provide leadership according to the school district's vision (Wayland, 2010). Despite the amount of literature available regarding the different roles of the superintendent, research is void of the perspective of African Americans historically, as well as currently, due to a lack of past opportunity and current emphasis (Smothers, 2009).

### **Transformational Leadership**

According to Bass and Avolio (1998), "Transformational leadership is closer to the prototype of leadership that people have in mind when they describe their ideal

leader, and it is more likely to provide a role model with which subordinates want to identify”.

Over the past fifteen years, school performance levels and federal accountability has been emphasized to a great degree (Daly & Finnigan, 2012). Federal programs such as No Child Left Behind, and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, specifically focused on school reform and innovation, define the intent behind greater accountability for our nation’s schools (Daly & Finnigan, 2012). Urban schools typically belong to large central bureaucracies that are characteristically slow in responding to the needs of its schools (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Weiner, 1999).

According to Burns, transforming leadership “is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents” (Burns, 1978; Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). Bureaucracies, historically experienced to be complex, inefficient, and rigid, are by nature dysfunctional, and require leaders to transform staffs. (Weiner, 1999; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). A byproduct of the dysfunctional governance of urban schools may actually result in the separation of the schools from the communities they are intended to serve (Weiner, 1999; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). School reform efforts, veritably arose and continue to exist as a result of a desire to address concerns with the performance of urban school districts, through standardized educational practices intended to address the needs of all students in the same manner by employing a uniform or rigid process (Weiner, 1999; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014).

## **Leadership in Diverse Settings**

African American school superintendents have traditionally served in large urban cities with majority African American student populations that feature crowded classrooms, inadequate funding, and deficiencies of instructional resources (Weiner, 1999; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). Examples of such include Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Chicago (Jackson, 1995; Simmons, 2005; Tillman, 2004; CGCS, 2014; NABSE, 2016). The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has collected data regarding demographics of the superintendency since 1953, but unfortunately this data did not include race as a specific category until 1982. Prior to that time, data on Black superintendents were classified under the category of “minorities” (Jackson, 1999). Data collected in 1982 indicated that African American superintendents represented a mere 0.7% of school superintendents nationally, a figure derived by only 57 individuals (Valverde & Brown, 1988). Eight years later, during 1989-1990 school year, the number of African American superintendents had increased to 142, or 1.6% of superintendents nationally (Jackson, 1995), and by the 1997 school year, data reveals a dramatic increase of African Americans serving in the role of superintendent with 47% leading urban school districts (Valverde, 2003).

Representation of African Americans identified in the role of superintendent has greatly increased over the past 50 years due to an establishment of political and educational power of presence, or what some refer to as clout. The National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE, 2012) reports that of the greater than 14, 500 current superintendents in the United States, 323 are African American with males accounting

for 222 of the total that serve in 36 of the 52 states in the nation. The greatest concentration of African American superintendents serve in the states of Mississippi (43), Illinois (27), and Arkansas (25) (NABSE, 2012).

When compared to their European American counterparts, and also considering statistical data accumulated over time, the numbers of African Americans appointed to superintendent positions have increased significantly, particularly in urban school districts. However, when one considers the total number of potential positions that exist within the nation, there remains a significant statistical discrepancy.

In 2003, NABSE, working in partnership with the Education Trust, initiated a study of African Americans in the superintendency. Included in the report are demographical data regarding African American superintendents and the districts they served. Findings from the report include the following: (a) the majority of the districts (148) were comprised of 1 and 10 schools while 15 districts identified in the report were comprised of 100 schools or more. It is clear from these data that districts are headed by African American superintendents varied in size, (b) Of the 248 districts, 133 were led by African American Superintendents predominantly in urban areas. However, 74 rural districts were led by an African American superintendent., (c) Superintendents included in this study were responsible for more than 3 million of the 47.7 million public school students in the country; supervised approximately 6,000 schools including more than 193,000 teachers; and managed budgets totaling approximately 25.1 billion dollars., (d) The ethnic makeup of the 3 million plus students served in districts led by NABSE superintendents consisted of 1.7 million or 54% African American students; 789,227

European Americans students, and 481,699 were of Latino descent., (e) Roughly 1.7 million of the 3 million students in these districts were identified as “low income”.

Ultimately, the results of the 2003 study indicate that high academic performance and efficient operational performance of large urban school districts led by African American leaders, while difficult, is clearly possible. While the report features a select group of African American superintendents, the data provides a representative sample of African American superintendents leading U.S. public school districts.

Current data (NABSE, 2016) indicates that there are 178 African American superintendents identified in their database (see APPENDIX F). According to the California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrators (2017), as of January 2017, there were 29 African Americans serving in the role of superintendent. Likewise, according to the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators, as of January 2017, there were 27 African Americans serving in the role of superintendent in the state of Texas (TABSE, 2017). Of the combined 56 individuals identified in both states, less than half are identified as affiliated with NABSE.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

In this research study, four African American male superintendents who lead diverse school districts across the nation were selected in hopes of expanding the scope of literature detailing experiences of African American male superintendents. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym and questions were posed to each participant based on the instrument. The foundation of this study lies in the data. This qualitative study features the story of each participant as captured in their own words in order to provide a rich representation of the ideas presented. As defined by Sarbin (1986), a narrative is:

a way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions;  
it is achievement that brings together mundane facts and fantastic  
creations; time and place are incorporated. The narrative allows for  
the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of  
happening. (p.9)

The stories of the participants included in this study highlights the challenges each faces as urban school district superintendents, and details their path to their current role.

#### **Background**

School district demographics are an integral part of the makeup of what is considered an urban district. Additionally, size and geographic location also play a role in not only the identification of an urban district, but it also underscores the characteristics that urban district leaders have to contend with.

In order to provide meaning and context for the information gathered, I organized the data in the following manner: (1) a description of each district to include enrollment of students, demographic breakdown, and number of campuses; and (2) a description of the community to include geographic location, population, demographics, major industry, average salary and the median income of households within the community.

### **The Districts**

The first district included in this study is located in Colorado, encompasses 19 square miles, and has 13 elementary schools, one k-8 community school, three middle schools, two high schools, one high school prep academy, one home school program and two charter schools, all of which serve a student population diverse in economic backgrounds and rich in ethnic pride. Currently, the district has an enrollment of 11,746 students with a demographic breakdown of 14.58% African American, 1.98% Asian/Pacific Islander, 49.64% Latino, 1.04% Native American, and 25.1% European American.

The second district included in this study, an urban characteristic district, is located southwest of Houston, Texas. The district has a total of 37 schools comprised of 23 elementary schools, 4 middle (6th grade campuses), 5 junior high schools, and five high schools. Currently, the district has an enrollment of 29,631 students with a demographic breakdown of 19.1% African American, 6.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 44.3% Latino, 0.3% Native American, and 27.7% White.



The third district represented in this study is located in Virginia and serves nearly 24,000 students, representing the region's diverse socioeconomic mix. The district is comprised of 26 elementary schools, including one charter school, eight middle schools, five comprehensive high schools and three specialty schools including a gifted and talented which serves students at the elementary and middle school levels. High school students are offered advanced placement and dual enrollment courses. Academically advanced students may also earn the prestigious International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma. Demographically, the district is 75% African American, 1% Asian, 1% Hawaiian, 12.8% Hispanic, 9% White, and the district is 75% economically disadvantaged.

The fourth and final district represented in this study is located in southern California and encompasses 9 square miles of Los Angeles County and roughly 13 square miles southwest of the city of Los Angeles. The district currently serves 11,000 students in 18 schools, six of which have earned a distinguished school designation, and one recognized as a national Blue Ribbon school. The demographic composition of the district is 60% Latino, 40% African-American, and 100% lower socioeconomic status or low income students of color.

### **The Communities**

Community #1 is located in the east central portion of the state of Colorado and is comprised of 194.6 square miles. The city has many features of modern urban areas such as parks, bike trails, and urban open-area spaces. However, due to its tremendous growth in population, issues such as crime, and government budget issues, the city is

plagued with problems that many urban areas face. While the city itself is predominately White with 78% of the population, the school district, located in the southern sector of the city, is predominately Hispanic and Black. The economy is driven by the military with a median income per household of \$45, 081, and a median income per family of \$53, 478.

Community # 2 is located southwest of Houston and the city itself covers just over 7 square miles. With a population of just under 20,000, the city is made up of 36% White, 28% Black, 26% Hispanic, and 23% Asian. The median income for a household is \$61, 084, with a median income per family of \$63, 244. The per capita income for the city is \$27, 082. The industry in the community is driven by a declining manufacturing infrastructure.

Community #3 has a population of 204, 214 located at the intersection of two major interstates. The economy is primarily driven by law, finance, and government (federal, state, and local). The city has a demographic make-up of 50% Black, 40% White, 5% Asian, and remaining 6% of Hispanic. The median income for a household is \$31, 121, with a median income per family of \$38, 348. The per capita income for the city is \$20, 337. Roughly 17% of families, and 21% of the population lives the poverty line.

Community #4 has a population of 109, 673 and has a total area of 9.1 square miles. The city is densely populated with approximately 12,000 people per square mile. The racial makeup of the city is 44% Black, and 23% White. Hispanics of any race make up 50% of the population.

The median income of the city is \$46, 574 with the major infrastructure provided by federal offices.

### **Purposeful Sample**

For this study, I selected participants using purposeful sampling criteria in order to collect the experiences of each under consistent conditions. Purposeful sampling allowed me to include participants who have experienced the phenomenon under consideration and from whom I may learn the most (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Merriam, 1988).

For this study, I interviewed four African American male superintendents who lead diverse urban school districts across the nation. Each participant is identified using a pseudonym. As a condition of this study, a successful school district is defined as having demonstrated prolonged academic achievement and improvement in closing achievement gaps, as well as having been acknowledged as successful as evidenced through various awards and recognitions. Further the districts represented in this study are urban emergent and urban characteristic districts. The criteria for the selection of participants was as follows:

- African American male superintendent;
- Served in the capacity of superintendent for a minimum of three years;
- Presently serving as superintendent in an urban, or suburban district with urban characteristics;
- Has impacted the district's academic performance as a result of their leadership as evidenced by national recognition or awards of acknowledgement.

## **Positionality**

Designed to reveal a target audience's range of behavior and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues, this qualitative study relied heavily on me, the researcher, as the primary instrument. Using in-depth study of this small group of people to guide and support the construction of hypotheses, the results of this qualitative research are descriptive and were conducted in person, by telephone, via and videoconferencing.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that "the human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues and the like" (p.187). For this study, I served as the primary, insider, instrument, and thus I was afforded a degree of social proximity, that provided an increased awareness between those I interviewed and I regarding the topic of what it means to be an African American male superintendent in this day. As the primary instrument in this study, I employed the use of interviews to gather information directly from participants as primary sources regarding their perception of the construction of leader persona and the way they lead their school districts' toward academic success. While reviewing literature regarding this study, common themes and patterns emerged and elicited my own curiosities regarding this topic, and that natural protocol was easily established in my study.

I used a guided approach to naturalistic interviews beginning with a list of concerns to be addressed by each contributor while permitting other topics to surface. As

a means of controlling the emergence of predetermined responses while conducting the interviews, I asked open-ended questions during the interviews. There were three primary foci used in the interview which consisted of personal stories of the participants; participant perceptions regarding leadership effectiveness; and their impact (current and historic) on the academic performance of students within the district they lead. I employed semi-structured interviews guided by the use of open-ended questions to provide opportunities to extend dialogue beyond initial questions thereby creating conversation that allowed for further inquiry through the extension of questions that emerged during the conversations. I left open the option by request for follow-up interviews for verification and clarification purposes.

In each case study, interviews were conducted with the participants to seek an understanding of their self-perceptions regarding their leadership effectiveness. The interviews were conducted primarily by phone with participants positioned in a location that provided a quiet, distraction free environment suited for conversation. As expected, the duration of each interview ranged from a little over a half an hour to ninety minutes in length. In order to minimize logistical constraints such as postponements, cancellation or schedule conflicts, all interviews were pre-scheduled. Immediately upon the completion of each interview, which were audio recorded, I organized any notes taken during the interview which allowed me to recall other things that were not noted when the actual conversation occurred.

With participant permission, I audio recorded each interview using a digital audio recorder in addition to taking handwritten notes. Handwritten notes, while very limited, allowed me to gather anecdotal information such as visible mannerisms and tone

inflections during responses and dialogue that may not necessarily be captured via audio recording. The combination of both information gathering procedures provided greater assurance of accurate accounting of information shared by participants. Digital recording allowed me the opportunity to access the actual interview repetitively during the process of interpretive analysis, thus assuring the accuracy of the information within. Transcriptions were verified through comparison with the digital audio recording.

### **Data Collection**

Among the various data collection techniques, interviews can be considered the best way to get the information that is wanted (Merriam, 1998). In this study, data such as audio-taped interviews, recorded field notes, non-verbal cues, and participant observations were used to capture information through nonlinguistic signs.

My field notes consist of a written account of observations, conversations, experiences, and descriptions shared by the participants and the events they identify that both directly or indirectly affected their path to and way of leadership. Marshall and Rossmann (1989) define observations as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p.79), and can range from very focused to unstructured forms. Prior to the interviews, I provided a human subject’s form to each participant for the purpose of assuring confidentiality of personal information (name, etc.).

### **Research Design**

This research study was conducted using a case study method on four African American male school district superintendents. I adopted this qualitative research framework to gain an understanding of how these superintendents of urban school

districts exercise and (re)interpret (Dillard, 1995, 2012) their leadership. The intent of this case study is to expand upon the limited research base relating to the lived stories and experiences of the superintendency from those whose voices can inform others about pertinent issues of leadership from a diverse perspective. In order to develop a clearer understanding of the administrators' perceptions on diverse leadership as it relates to student academic performance, this study investigated the constructed meanings of the relationship between their lived experiences and the way they lead.

For this study, I utilized qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth account of the personal and professional characteristics, perceptions of leadership methods, and approaches to affecting academic student success through leadership of four African American male superintendents in diverse urban school districts. Because qualitative methods come easier to the human as instrument, research suggests that qualitative methods are better suited as a matter of process within the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, humans as instrument are compelled more toward methods that serve as extensions of normal human behaviors, such as observing, listening, speaking, and reading.

Qualitative research is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology, where the social reality is viewed as a group of meanings constructed by the individuals who participate in that reality. Therefore, the major purpose of this study was to discover the nature of those meanings. A semi structured form of inquiry was used to assist me in explaining the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. This study focuses on interpretation and meaning of participant responses. Characteristics of qualitative research as explained by Merriam (1998) include an overarching interest in

understanding the meaning people have constructed, and an inductive approach to knowledge generation. In this research study, I serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis with an expected end product of descriptive narrative.

Conducting interviews is expected to facilitate in the development and understanding of the principles the participants attribute to their success by allowing them the space to tell their own stories. The fundamental tenets of qualitative data are emphasized through the lived experiences of individuals, thus providing meaning with regards to events, process, and structures that shape the lives of the individual (Miles & Huberman 1994).

### **Data Analysis**

To understand human behavior one must understand the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This research study is anchored in the assumption that features of the social environment of the participants are constructed as interpretations by individuals and that those interpretations tend to be situational. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), the focus of qualitative research serves multiple purposes, and is derived by applying an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. The employment of qualitative methods leads me to understand the complexity of participant's situations from their own perspectives, as well as the meaning of the events that have shaped their personal and professional lives. Further, the significance of setting, context, and participant perception emerged as a point of emphasis constructing a generation of theory (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Lastly, as a condition of the interviews, I attempted to honor



subjective, personal, meaning and definition, commonalities and voices of each participant.

In regards to a naturalistic inquiry, data analysis is open ended and inductive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and thus is initiated during the data collection process and continues after the collection is complete. Data in this study was obtained from interviews, observations, and field notes. The audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim, and verified for accuracy. The process of analyzing the data occurred upon the completion of each interview and observation. Conclusions were constructed by unitizing, coding, and categorizing the themes and patterns identified in the experiences collected from the data.

For the purpose of defining categories, I employed the method of unitizing data to outline categories that are related or of the same content. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), categorizing is proficient when it is defined in such a way that “they are internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible” (p 349). Thus, I examined, deconstructed, and compared the categorized data by using individual narrative sets concerning broad topics, while examining categories for overlapping themes or concepts.

### **Complementary Data Gathering Techniques**

It was necessary to employ complementary data collection strategies and techniques in order to gather additional data. The purpose of utilizing additional techniques was to enhance the collection of the data for interpretation. Digital audio recordings, field notes, and nonverbal cues are discussed in the next section.

### ***Audio Recordings***

A digital audio recorder was used to record interviews with the participants. I used transcriptions to review and correct any inaccurate or unclear audio.

### ***Field Notes***

I collected field notes to assist in the composition of written documentation of the observations, dialogue, experiences, and descriptions shared by the participants regarding events that affect them directly or indirectly. My field notes, while minimal, served the purpose of capturing the expression of feelings or participant mannerisms, thoughts about the investigation, and a way of keeping record of any follow-up interview sessions that may have been need.

Field notes allowed observations of nonverbal characteristics to be captured via field and include body movements, facial expressions, spatial relationships, use of time as in pacing, probing, and pausing, volume, voice quality, voice inflections, and touching (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I asked clarifying questions during the interviews to ensure that I did not misunderstand any nonverbal cues.

### ***Trustworthiness and Credibility***

Building or establishing an identity of trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is critical (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability that one establishes trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an effort to establish trustworthiness and credibility in this study, I constructed an audit trail intended to reflect triangulation of the data through the use of interviews, observations, and recorded field notes. This procedure guided me in keeping the data in an understandable and retrievable form. Further, in an effort to maintain ethical standards, I

assured my participants privacy, confidentiality, and inclusiveness through written attestation.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is a crucial technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process involves data verification by participants, and the interpretations collected through the interviews. Member checking can be either formal or informal, and can possibly help to provide participants an opportunity to share additional information, correct errors, and to evaluate overall adequacy. To provide this multi-faceted benefit, I offered to provide the participants a copy of the interview transcripts for review, clarification, and suggestions.

### **Transferability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is recommended as the qualitative counterpart for external validity, and additionally they state,

“if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator rather than with the person seeking to make the application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298).

According to this statement, the primary researcher may only describe one specific situation and its meaning of a particular situation for the participants in the study; the reader then applies the findings to situations in which he or she has been involved. If such is the case, it was my intent to provide readers of this study the opportunity to apply different aspects of my work to situations in which they may experience.

## **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability, the substitute for reliability for the naturalist, can be demonstrated by “taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change” (p.289), according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). To provide dependability, I examined the records for the purposes of accuracy and authentication. I objectively collected and analyzed the data I collected in phases to verify and construct findings that may be important to increase what little is known about African American superintendents. To demonstrate confirmability, I kept a record of the inquiry process, digital copies of the audio interview recordings and discussions, written notes from the interviews and discussions, and physical copies of all transcriptions.

## **Summary**

I chose qualitative research methods for my study due to its nature, setting, and aspects related to my personal interest. I consistently followed specific steps and procedures in order to provide a thorough view of African American male superintendents perceptions on leadership. I investigated the constructed meanings of the relationship between lived experiences of four African American superintendents and the way they lead by employing interpretive lenses. I endeavored to emphasize naturalistic inquiry in an effort to help me investigate the lived stories and experiences of the participants involved in this study. I believe that others can be informed and guided through the stories and voices of the African American male superintendents involved in this study, and that others can be informed about issues of leadership

through diversity. In effort to clearly illustrate and provide meaningful conception of the conditions surrounding these issues, I organized the study related to each participant by providing a description of each district to include enrollment of students, demographic composition of each, the number of campuses within each, and awards or recognitions of each participant or the district they lead. Further, I provided a description of each community including their geographic location and demographic population.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

Using a combination of thematic and interpretive data analysis, my findings presents the voices of four African American male superintendents regarding their leadership in diverse school districts from across the nation. To preserve the essence of the messages provided by each participant, the actual words of each is used to tell their story in order to maintain the integrity of the ideas presented. I have attempted to tell each superintendent's story using information (data) gathered from audio taped interviews. In order to illustrate the individual messages collected from each participant, the data is organized in the following manner: (a) introductory profile providing a description and background of each participant, (b) an independent review of responses provided by each participant to each research question, and (c) presentation of themes arranged categorically and supported by the data from the individual interviews, and the overall responses to the research questions. To protect the identity of the participants, I have given each a pseudonym.

Each participant spoke very passionately about their experiences, and much of what each said was repeated in responses to most of the questions; a theme I found in common among all participants. For instance, as each participant described their personal backgrounds beginning with their childhood through to today, there were common elements that seemingly repeated themselves throughout their responses to each question. As each shared their story, I found myself engulfed in the passion of their words. Therefore, I utilized the actual expressed words by the participants to tell

their stories with the intentions of providing the most accurate description of the thoughts and ideas presented by each participant. The conversation and personal stories provided by each participant were guided by the following overarching research questions:

1. How do African American male superintendents in urban school districts describe their identities?
2. How do African American male superintendents describe being a leader in an urban public school district?
3. How do African American male superintendents in urban school districts describe their acts of equity leadership related to student outcomes?

Participants were asked open-ended, semi-structured questions during the interview (See Appendix A) in accordance with the operational frameworks I discussed in Chapter II. The individual interviews allowed the participants to tell their stories related to the experiences they have had as an African American male superintendent leading diverse school districts in Texas, California, Virginia, and Colorado.

This section begins with a profile of each participant. Employing a thematic analysis, there were three major themes that emerged from the interviews with the superintendents. The major themes were: (1) strong parental influence; (2) emphasis on team; (3) and professional commitment. Subthemes that emerged from the interviews with the superintendents include, educator influence under strong parental influence. Collaboration and cohesive effort emerged under emphasis on team. Strong work ethic emerged under professional commitment. The superintendent's responses to the

individual interview questions as related to the research questions will be discussed and the section will be summarized.

### **The Millennial Superintendent's Profile**

The Millennial Superintendent is the youngest and least tenured participant of the superintendents included in this study. In January 2013, the Millennial was appointed superintendent of his district in the state of Colorado. The Millennial superintendent's district serves over 11,000 students with 26 schools, including four charter agreements, one home school academy and one detention center for youth. Prior to his arrival in the district, he served 4 years in the United States Army, worked in the Baltimore City Public School System for 13 years as a Science Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, and Area Support Superintendent, and worked in the Houston Independent School District for three years as a Regional Superintendent.

The Millennial is an educational leader who strongly believes that all children deserve a quality education that will enable them to become productive learners within society. This is evident in a number of accomplishments made by his school district. Some notable examples of those accomplishments include: 1.) improvements in academic achievement by being recognized as one district who has closed the racial achievement gap in the State of Colorado; 2.) increases in advance placement course offerings and examination pass rate; 3.) improvements in graduation rate; 4.) improvements in educational technology; and 5.) recognition by the Colorado Department of Education for academic achievement at various schools.



As superintendent, the Millennial has implemented the following educational initiatives: 1.) a world-class common core state standards-based curriculums to improve instruction and student achievement; 2.) personalized learning opportunities; 3.) early college program; 5.) dropout and credit recovery program; 6.) one-to-one technology program; 7.) technology infrastructure to support wireless accessibility district-wide; and 8.) free breakfast, lunch and dinner program district-wide.

Some additional accomplishments the Millennial has made since arriving in his district are: Training for National Superintendent Certification with AASA: The School Superintendents Association, presenting at the National Alliance of Black School Educators Aspiring Superintendents Institute and recognition as the Superintendent of the Year by The Education Center in Denver, Colorado. Currently, the Millennial is a participant in The Broad Academy Class of 2017 Cohort.

The Millennial holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore; a Master of Science degree in Biology from Morgan State University, Doctoral Fellowship in Science Education from Morgan State University and a Doctor of Education degree from Capella University. He also holds a Human Resource Management Graduate Certificate from Southern New Hampshire University.

### **The Millennial Superintendent's Interview**

I initially reached out to the Millennial superintendent via a professional social network in which we are a part of as a common connection. Although I had never met or corresponded with the Millennial, he responded to my message almost immediately

and provided me with instructions to follow to set up a time to interview him which started with contacting his executive assistant. After some back and forth to address the logistics of conducting the interview via video conference, we were able to establish the date, time, and digital media platform that we would use. The assistant even went through a few test runs with me a couple of days prior to the interview to ensure that things went smoothly. Of course, as luck would have it, we still encountered technical difficulties with the audio on the platform. Despite the technical difficulties, and several awkward minutes trying to work through the technical challenges, the Millennial was very patient and worked adamantly to establish the connection; reassuring me several times in the wake of the connection that all was well and that I needn't worry about the time that seemed to be flying by. It is important to note that establishing a time to meet with a superintendent is very difficult, especially in the final weeks of preparation for the start of the school year, and I made absolutely certain to acknowledge my appreciation of his time given the circumstances of the time-frame for our interview.

After finally resolving the technical difficulties, the Millennial, a rather tall and distinguished looking gentleman, began talking in general about the preparation for the school year, and during our conversation, we became aware that we have several professional acquaintances in common, which, put me a bit at ease. I actually currently work with several of his former colleagues, and he (the Millennial) has a principal working under his direction that I previously worked with as well. As we began the discussion regarding my study, the Millennial expressed his appreciation of being

selected to participate, and that he felt honored to be a part of my work, which I took as a great compliment.

I began the interview with the question, “so tell me, who is....”? To which the Millennial responded, “good question. Well I’m this young African American, little boy who was sitting on his porch in the projects of Baltimore City, just intrigued about the work around science and the work around education”. The Millennial continued on by describing that he had always been interested in figuring out a way to marry the two. He describes, “for me, when I went to school, the whole gamut of the greater experience really started in the 7th grade”. The start of the interview was quite interesting in that the Millennial did not begin the conversation as I expected. He began with when his interest for the profession began. He really jumped right into the foundational reason he ultimately ended up becoming an educator. The Millennial began to tell a story about his 7th grade science teacher, a man named Mr. Clem. He described Mr. Clem as a Caucasian man, short in stature, not much taller than he as a 7th grader. The Millennial stated that “he (Mr. Clem) was an amazing teacher, and the way that he (Mr. Clem) conveyed concepts of science, and the way in which he taught, is what really made him interested in the content, and ultimately lead to his interest in teaching. The Millennial stated that his initial career goal would to have been a pharmacist and that he would teacher Pharmacy students. However, having had Mr. Clem as his teacher for two years, in the seventh and ninth grades, he described the experience as “phenomenal”, and provides insight into just who is today. The Millennial went on to list other influential people in his life, his parents, his siblings, his other teacher, and several colleagues and

friends that impacted and contributed to who he is today. The Millennial makes a statement at this point that was a bit peculiar given the topic. He says, “and just looking at how do we make sure that we have an equal playing field for students we serve today, and put them in a space where they have a Mr. Clem”. This statement spoke volumes to me as I have a similar personal story, but more importantly, the Millennial established right from the start of the conversation where his priorities really lie when it comes to providing for and addressing the needs of students. Clearly this illustrates that he places great value on the influence and impact that teachers and educators make on students.

I asked the Millennial about his years of experience as a teacher and administrator and what that experience was like prior to becoming a superintendent. He started his career, “interestingly enough, like Mr. Clem”, as a seventh grade science teacher in the Baltimore City public school system. After teaching for five years, he transitioned to be an assistant principal in a K-8 school in Baltimore. After serving as an assistant principal for two years, he became a part of another school (also as an assistant principal) as member of a staff led by a principal that was participating in a distinguished principal program offered by the state of Maryland. The distinguished principal program was comprised of principals that were noted for turning around underperforming schools. The Millennial worked in the capacity of a lead AP or Principal intern for a year prior to transitioning into the head principal of that same school where he served in that capacity for four years. Following his tenure as an elementary principal, the Millennial transitioned into what Baltimore called a Network Lead, a position similar to an area superintendent, with responsibilities that calls for providing coaching, support,

and guidance for a group of principals. In this role, the Millennial really helped the principals to transition and transform their campuses to improve. Essentially, in the Millennials words, “leading a team of folks to actually help me in getting that work completed”.

The Millennial worked in the capacity of Network Lead for a year, and then he transitioned to Houston Independent School District to assume a similar role as a School Improvement Officer or SIO. In Houston, the Millennial started off leading a cluster of schools in south Houston, a relatively low income area of the city with school populations that were predominately comprised of African American and Hispanic students from low income homes. After a year of working with schools in south Houston, the Millennial was assigned to work with schools on the west side of the district, which served a mostly Hispanic population, but also families that were predominately low income. Eventually, the Millennial was assigned to schools in the central sector of the school district that served predominantly Caucasian students and schools that were more affluent.

The time spent in the role of School Improvement Office in the Houston, TX area, provided the Millennial with widely varied experiences over the three-year period that he was there, all which played a role in his obtaining and transitioning to his current role of superintendent in Colorado, where he has served for four years.

After some brief comments regarding his predecessor in the role of superintendent in Colorado, who happened to have hired me to work in the district he left for, we continued on with the interview. I asked the Millennial how he would

describe his identity as an African American male serving in the role of superintendent in an urban school district in Colorado, and this is how he responded:

I think it's really important, and this is for anybody, but specifically as African American males and female superintendents, be you! You have to be yourself. You can't attempt to be the individuals that may surround you. I'm not a Caucasian man. I'm not a Caucasian woman. I'm an African American man and that's all I can be, and I think that's important for anybody to understand. One, what are your core values, what are your core beliefs. What are those things that you're willing to compromise versus those things that you absolutely will not compromise, and then show people those things. Show people who you are around those things. I am absolutely never ever going to compromise my integrity for anybody. So I'm gonna show you that. I'm going to show you that I am going to tell you the truth, even when its ugly. I am never ever going to compromise my will to fight for students who may not necessarily have what they should based on their circumstances, because of their zip code, where they live...So I'm gonna show that to people and I'm gonna let people know that that is who I am and where my stance lies.

I asked the Millennial how he would describe being an African American leader of an urban school district, and what his experiences have been like. The Millennial stated that he thought his reception, or the way he was received by the community was "pretty good". He states that he believes the community accepted him because the way

he started his work with the community and with the district was by “listening and getting a feel and getting an understanding of how things are done here”. He states he sought to identify what was important to the people there in his section of the city, and what the community believed about the work we can do for students and the work they were currently doing for students. He wanted to know what it was that individuals may have as expectations for him, but he also wanted to express and share what his expectations were for them, “and how would we expect to engage in this relationship that we are about to embark on”. The fact that the Millennial took the time to and made opportunities to listen and dialogue the community in which he works, says to me that it's important for servant leaders (a term used by the Millennial to describe himself) to know and understand those he serves. He states:

So at times when you think about being an African-American male superintendent in a predominately white state predominately white location city where ninety-nine point eight percent of the superintendents are Caucasian, and typically Caucasian men, I don't believe that there was any level of mistreatment of any sort. And perhaps it's just by the nature of who I am because I'm not gonna allow myself to be mistreated. So I think that had a lot to do with it. But, the comfort level, I was pretty comfortable...I just think that when it comes down to having individuals that look like you, there were none. There were no individuals that look like me. It took time for me to build relationships with folks because we just didn't have that commonality from the beginning.

The Millennial went on to state that while common, or what may be expected to be, connections that one may have with individuals with whom they may be able to relate to, the same ethnicity as an example, while that didn't exist upon his arrival to Colorado, he hadn't encountered or experienced any inappropriate behaviors with anyone, that no-one was rude or non-receptive. He states that "it was really a matter of folks just trying to figure out who I am, and I trying to figure out who are they".

When asked to provide or identify the values or personal qualities he has found significant throughout his career as an administrator, the Millennial's initial and immediate response was that it was definitely telling the truth. "You just have to be truthful in situations, even when its ugly and not something that people want to hear". The Millennial went on to describe that he has a good way of connecting with people through storytelling, and the ability to be able to communicate his personal story.

When asked how he would describe his acts of equity leadership, the Millennial begins to describe his childhood, which signifies to me that the source of his values was instilled in him at an early age. He states:

Growing up in the inner city of Baltimore, there were challenges without a shadow of a doubt, there were challenges, but it's not impossible to overcome those challenges. So understanding and knowing that, I knew that what I went through as a kid. I knew what I had to work through going to inner schools where not every educator had my best interest. Not every educator cared about my best interest. But there were some who did, and what was the impact that those individuals had on my life that



took me to where I am today, and being able to share that with people is what I think really helps to bring them along. For me, my thought is always I only want to work with kids who are coming from the not so best circumstances or situations, not to say there are kids who come from affluent families or households or situations, that they don't need great educators because they do need great educators. But I want to be the one who will work with the kid who was once me when I was younger. How do I help to paint the picture that it doesn't... everything isn't going to be equal, and it should not be equal. It more has to be equitable, you get what you need which may be different or more than what someone else may need.

I asked the Millennial as a leader, how he addresses teacher and staff turnover in an effort to maintain the equity established in those individuals that were leaving the organization and what that meant for students. The Millennial states that while the district has made some improvements with regards to getting staff to be “on board” with addressing every single child and recognizing every single child because “it's a message that I'm consistently sending”. The Millennial and his team have set out to engrain and instill a mindset of equity that lies at the core of the staff. By creating a culture where adults take intentional steps to address and insure students' needs are being met, equitable actions if you will, success can be attained for all and goals will be realized by the organization. He states:

...I think it's more so us being true with our core values and beliefs...And really to tell ourselves the dirty ugly truth about our true biases, our true thoughts, our true opinions and feelings toward a certain group, that can be right or wrong. But then also being open to be able to, be willing to change that viewpoint. And I get that that's challenging at times, but I think that it is possible. And I think that we're able to do that... the more and more diversity that we allow ourselves to embrace...and sometimes it's not comfortable for us, because it could be new, but I think we have to step into that zone of discomfort and just work through it.

The Millennial continued on, speaking very passionately about the importance of being truthful about the inequalities that exist for kids, and “not being afraid to put those inequalities on the table for discussion, to make them known in order that they can be addressed”. He warned against applying labels to individuals that may not readily recognize that an inequality exists, but that it's important to make those challenges clear and known. He states that he thinks people perhaps classify this as “courage”, the courage to be able to identify or point out “ills”, and to be willing to dialogue and strategize around addressing those ills or inequalities.

The next quality identified by the Millennial is the ability to be humble. Acknowledge intelligence, appreciate intelligence, but do not allow that intelligence to allow anyone to think, or to present to anyone that you have all of the answers. The Millennial states that not having all of the answers “doesn't put me on a platform to be less intelligent”. Not having all of the answers simply of being human, and having to

rely on others, your team, to complete a task, address a concern, move the organization forward.

Another characteristic identified by the Millennial that has served him well, not only in his current position, but actually contributed to his success in previous positions, and this is being visible and approachable. “Be visible and being approachable to anybody and everybody”. The Millennial states that you may see him anywhere, and you will see him talking to everybody. The Millennial discussed the importance of not only speaking or conversing with people that can be mutually beneficial for a specific purpose, but that is equally important to converse with people that have a perspective that has not been considered or an idea that has not been explored.

So that visibility piece really shows people that you're human. It shows people that you are accessible; it shows people that you are approachable, that they can have a conversation with you that they can rely on you, and that they can trust you and they know that you have their best interests at heart. And I think that's the relationship piece that occurs... when you're actually visible.

While he could not site a setting for his passion, he did however share a story from his childhood that was a turning point regarding his commitment to honesty and to always tell the truth. He told a story that his mother sent him to the store to purchase an item, and believing that he would have enough for the item to have change leftover following the purchase, he asked his mother if he could use the change to purchase candy for himself. The Millennials mother denied his request, and she informed him to

purchase only what he was sent for and to return with her change. Of course that isn't how the story commences. Turns out, he was correct, there was sufficient change left over after the purchase his mother had sent him to the store for, but against his mother's wishes, the Millennial purchased himself a candy bar which he scarfed down on his way home. Realizing that he would have to account for the missing change, he devised a story of having tripped as he walked the stairs to their home, and inadvertently lost the change during his fall. Unfortunately for the Millennial, his mother did not believe his story. In his words, the end of the story:

And of course being an adult and being a sensible adult she knew that that wasn't true. She knew that I had purchased something so she asked to smell my breath. Of course you could smell the candy bar. So the message that she sent to me in that moment really changed my way of thinking about being honest. And she said to me, you know I know that you purchased something with that change and then you created this situation to make it appear that you lost the change instead of telling me the truth that you spent change. She said it really really hurts mommy's heart when you don't tell mommy the truth. And from that moment on I never ever lied to my mom because I never wanted to hurt her. And that really sent the message to me, honesty is important even when it is ugly, and in that situation it was ugly. Honesty is important. You have to make sure that you're always being honest. So I really try very hard to make sure that I'm always being honest.

My interview with the Millennial ended with him stating that the success of a district, is not always tied to a measurable outcome. Just as important as the measurable, are the intangible occurrences that happen every day in schools. He urges that stories of individual success, while somewhat difficult to quantify, are equally as important, and that “it’s important make a difference in others’ lives; those are things you should talk about as you talk about the successes of a district”.

### **The Statesman Superintendent’s Profile**

The Statesman became Superintendent of Schools in his current district in 2001 after a successful stint in another school district in Southeast Texas. Under his leadership his district is known around the state for academic excellence. During his tenure, the District has twice been recognized by Texas School Business magazine for its best practices. The District has earned the HEB Excellence in Education Award for Best Large District and three campuses achieved the highest possible honor: National Blue Ribbon School. Student success is commonplace in the district with multiple state championships in athletics and fine arts—among countless other honors and awards.

For over a decade, the District has earned the Superior Achievement rating from the Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas (FIRST). In 2014, the Texas Comptroller also recognized the District as one of only 46 school districts across the state to achieve the highest level of student success and fiscal management as determined by the Financial Allocation Study for Texas (FAST) report.

Since the Statesman's arrival, the District has added over a dozen facilities—with plans for another dozen on the way. Student enrollment has increased from about 16,000

to roughly 30,000 and the staff has gone from 2,200 to 4,500—making the District the second-largest employer in the County.

The Statesman has a strong record of industry leadership, including service with the Texas Association of School Boards Risk Management Fund, the UIL Legislative Committee, the Texas FFA Association, the Texas Association of School Administrators, the Texas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Texas Academic Decathlon, the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators and the Texas Business and Education Coalition. He is a Past President of the Texas Association of School Administrators and a Past President of the Texas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

The Statesman served on the Texas Education Commissioner's Cabinet of Superintendents, the Policy Committee on Public Education Information and as an advisor for the Texas Education Agency's Recommended High School Plan. In 2008, the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives appointed the Statesman to the Select Committee on Public School Accountability.

The Statesman has been the Region 4 Superintendent of the Year and a finalist for Texas Superintendent of the Year. Other honors include the Leslie Hayley Community Service Award given by the Chamber of Commerce and the 2004 Texas Educational Support Staff Administrator of the Year Award. The Statesman is a Rotary Paul Harris Fellow and a recipient of Texas A&M's John R. Hoyle Award for Educational Leadership. He received an Oklahoma Regent of Higher Education

Fellowship and served on a focus group for the Council of Chief State School Officers in Washington D.C.

The Statesman earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Texas A&M University and a Doctorate from Oklahoma State University. At A&M, he was a Distinguished Student, and was named an Outstanding Graduate and a Notable Graduate nominee.

The Statesman began his education career as an agriculture teacher, then worked his way up the administrative ladder as an Assistant Principal, Principal and Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education. Ultimately, the Statesman is still a teacher at heart and he currently serves as an adjunct professor at Texas A&M University.

### **The Statesman Superintendent's Interview**

I had the distinct honor of meeting the Statesman a couple of years ago while attending an educational conference. My recollection of the statesman from that meeting was that he commanded respect almost instantaneously upon entering the room, and to hear him speak was no less attention getting. I contacted the Statesman via email, and to my surprise, he responded back mentioning that he remembered me and would be honored to participate in my study. I arrived at the district administration building a bit early which allowed me to walk around and observe the building. Everyone was very nice and inviting, and the aesthetic of the building was also very welcoming.

I entered the superintendent's suite after signing in and was greeted by his Administrative Assistant whom I had worked with to set up the interview. Feeling that

I had already met her, she actually hugged me as opposed to the normal handshake as a greeting upon meeting someone for the first time. Needless to say, I felt very welcomed to say the least. Within a few moments, the Statesman appeared and welcomed me into his office. The office was vibrant with a lot of light provided by an entire wall of glass facing the front of the building. As one might expect the room was large and had large conference table on one side and club chairs in front of a large mahogany desk. As we sat I expressed my appreciation for the Statesman allowing time to spend with him that afternoon and I assured him that I would remain within the ninety-minute time I requested.

We began the interview with small talk and moved into how we as Black men have a responsibility to not only be role models, but to actively assist others that are in education and aspire to be leaders. The Statesman spoke very passionately about what he sees as “our responsibility” to reach out and assist those that aspire to be school leaders, especially superintendents.

The Statesman grew up in little small community outside of Brenham, Texas called Independence. He grew up in a farming environment and according to him he did just about everything that you could possibly do in the farm and ranch world. He grew up during a time of chopping and picking cotton, hauling hay, working cattle and just about everything else you could imagine occurring on a farm. The Statesman, proud of his work ethic, states that he really believes that the work ethic he has employed throughout his career was established as a young boy working on the farm.



The Statesmen discussed what school was like for him as a student. He described the school as a two room school house, and then went directly into talking about the teacher that made the greatest impact on him as a child. He stated that while he had many good teachers, it was his Agriculture teacher that had the biggest impact on him. Statesman said, "I was determined to be exactly like he was, an Ag teacher, and I was determined to go to school (college) and be an Ag teacher". The Statesman further described the influence the teacher had, not only him, but on many in the community. He stated that his teacher taught Sunday school and was an African American individual that everybody in the community and surrounding communities looked up to.

As I listened to the Statesman tell his story I could only think about my personal experience and how eerily similar my story was to his. Like mine, his teacher had such an impact on him that the Statesman ultimately attended college and became a teacher just like his role model. The Statesman told a story of how he was influenced by a student teacher that was attending Texas A&M and how he impressed he was upon visiting the campus. The campus visit led to him enrolling at A&M and ultimately earning a bachelor's and a master's degree from the university. Upon completion of his bachelor's degree, the Statesman began his teaching career at a district in southeast Texas as an Agriculture teacher where he taught for four years. He originally planned to return to A&M to work towards a doctorate degree and become a professor there, however he decided to attend Oklahoma State University in Stillwater,

Oklahoma where he sought dual certification in Ag Ed and Public School Administration as part of his studies towards his doctorate degree.

Still wanting to work at A&M when he completed his doctorate, there were unfortunately no jobs, and while he did have opportunities out of state, as he put it, “my wife and I both decided that was all of the out of state experience that we wanted in Stillwater”. The Statesman took a position at Sam Houston State University training campus administrators. He eventually took a position as campus administrator in Conroe ISD as an assistant principal, and later associate principal. The Statesman described that time period as one filled with challenges as he was the only African American administrator on the campus, and despite being the only administrator there with an advanced degree (a doctorate), he experienced greater challenges than he had expected, however, he endured those challenges and was ultimately promoted to an assistant superintendent in the district where the schools under his direction performed very well. The Statesman had previously been offered a principal position in another district, but his superintendent, whom had recognized the ability of the Statesman, advised him not to accept the offer to become a principal, and a year later, made the Statesman assistant superintendent of Secondary Ed, a position he served in for six years.

The Statesman described why he believed he was successful in his position as being attributed to his willingness to actively seek opportunities to learn that which he was not knowledgeable or familiar with. He spent time working with the assistant superintendent of elementary schools in his district, as well as learning from other

people in other positions that he had not worked in before. He also talked about things that he did as a leader that set him apart from many other people that don't necessarily think to do. He discussed activities such as driving a bus, working with the maintenance crews, doing welding work as he is a certified welder, and while he did not assume the role of a custodian, he stated that he understood what one had to do in that position having learned from his mother who was a maid when he was growing up. Simply put, when the Statesman assumed the role of superintendent following his time as an assistant superintendent, "there were very few things that I saw that I hadn't experienced in some way or another".

I asked the Statesman to describe his identity as an African American male leading an urban school district, and this is what he said:

I'm a man first and foremost. I stand by the morals and values that I was raised with, and I stay true to who I am. As a Black man, I have always known that I would have to work harder than other people. I believe that my work ethic has defined me as much as anything else. I recognize, and have experiences in the past, that clearly suggest that I was being questioned simply because of my race, but I stand firm on what I believe and who I am. My ag teacher showed me, showed all of us that, when we were growing up, and I never got away from that. I have a very important job to do as superintendent, and I intend to do it. If someone has a problem with my race, well, I'd have to say it's their problem, not mine.

As the interview continued, the Statesman discussed his first superintendency where he took over a district that was struggling, academically and financially. According to the Statesman, the district had approximately \$26, 000 in fund balance when he took over the district, and they had to borrow money to just start the school year. Students were underperforming and staff morale was low; teachers had not attended out of district professional development in years. One of the few bright spots in the district was athletics, particularly the football team, which had won a state championship just prior to the Statesman's arrival in the district. He came to find that the athletic department had a healthy budget for professional development, but no other department in the district had any to speak of. He knew he had to address the situation, and this is some of how he described addressing the problem:

...and then we had a lot of things that we had to do to make all of that work. But because I was an assistant principal I understood, and a principal, I understood master schedules and I knew that high school was especially high... tons and tons of people, they just can't help themselves. So one of the first things that we did was ask for the master schedule and they were surprised that I even knew how to read it. And so we were able to take and make cuts and reduce staff and do the types of things that got us to the point where we were balanced budget and then we were able to start giving raises to people.

The Statesman discussed that he knew he had to address student achievement, and he knew that started in the classroom with what was being taught, so he had a

curriculum audit conducted. The results of the curriculum audit indicated huge deficits, so to address that, the district was able to purchase a curriculum, and paid teachers to modify and adjust the curriculum to meet their needs. Teachers felt liberated and valued, and not long after, teachers were provided opportunities to begin attending professional development with the help of the Regional Service Center. The Statesman indeed had made a difference in that district, which included growing the fund balance to over five million dollars, and it wasn't long before he was recruited to the district he currently leads, and has been there for the past 16 years. The Statesman shared an interesting fact, that when he began his career in education, he originally applied to teach in the district he now leads, and interestingly enough, he didn't even get an interview.

I've been here for 16 years. And the irony of all of this and I tell this story often, the very first job I applied for when I graduated from A&M was in this district as a teacher and I was not given the time of day. It may have been because my afro I don't know. But the bottom line was. I did not get that job. And so we ended up kind of a full circle. And so I've been here, this is my 16th year here.

The Statesman shared his story of his childhood. At about the age of seven his father left his family leaving his mother to raise him, his brother, and two sisters. They lived in a home owned by a family that did not reside there daily; they actually lived in Houston, but hired the Statesman's mother to be the caretaker of the property. The Statesman spoke of his mother with great affection stating that while his brother and

one sister gave his mother some challenges, he did not want to give her any trouble.

“Back during that time, raising children really was a community effort, and according to the Statesman, if you were caught doing something you had no business doing by a neighbor, they would address you and then take you home and inform your parent of the matter”. The Statesman says that the experience of having been raised in a single parent home has been helpful throughout his career, even as a superintendent, because he can relate to parents that are in a similar situation, and that sharing his story with them encourages them to trust him with their child.

It was... it also was one of those things that we're dealing with our kids now, and they are from single parent homes, I can relate to them. And oftentimes when I'm even talking... I was talking to a mother the other day and she was hot. She was upset with an incident that went on and as we were talking and I told her I said mom you know I'm from a single parent home and I'm telling you I understand what you're trying to do, as a mom trying to raise your kid, but you need to trust us on this one. And you know what, just knowing that I could relate to what her child was going through helped. It just, it just helped. So that's the kind of experiences I grew up with.

As the interview moved on, I asked the Statesman to describe what it has been like as an African American superintendent. The Statesman described his experience in his first superintendent position where the board was comprised of four Whites, and three African Americans. The district was “riddled with gang problems, poor

academic performance, and financial problems. “It seemed nothing was going well”, and this was the environment of his first superintendency as the first African American superintendent of that district. According to the Statesman, the odds were against him with all of the challenges:

...and oftentimes one of the challenges that African American superintendents have is that they usually are looked at when the district is in dire straits, when the challenges are so great that no one wants the job...I don't even know what the actual rational is, but for some...

While the Statesman had to address many issues affecting the district and make progress while doing so, by the time he left the district, student performance had improved dramatically and was on pace with high performing schools in the state of the same context. Further, the district had become financially sound, and a lot of the struggles that plagued the district were no longer challenges that were preventing performance. According to the Statesman, “when you as superintendent, lead a district to perform, sometimes what would be skeptics will be willing to take a chance on you”.

The Statesman then began to describe his experience upon entering his current district.

You're gonna always be tested... when I first came here, I had, one of the ladies on the board, that did not, she just didn't want me to come. She... there was somebody here that she wanted. And I said that I

wouldn't come unless it was 7-0 vote. And she voted to make sure that it was 7- 0, but as soon as I got here she started looking for an Achilles heel. And when I said that we'll balance the budget in two years, she just almost jumped out of her chair because she said I got him now, because he can't do it. But little did she know, that I just did it, so I felt like that I could pull that off here, because I knew where the people were at and that we could make those cuts. So you're gonna always be tested. You're going to be tested by African Americans who feel like that you're there for them, and you're going to be tested by Anglos who just don't feel like you're capable of doing the work. If you stay true to the work and you do it and you do it well, eventually what ends up happening is people will forget what you look like because they've seen you and know they've got.

As the discussion commenced, I asked the Statesman to identify qualities of leadership he feels are essential or non-negotiable as they pertain to sustaining a successful superintendency. The Statesman responded that he believes that integrity is one of the things that have provided him staying power. He went on to say that most people know that what he says he's going to do, he actually does it. He emphasized the importance of being consistent and treating everybody the same no matter who they may be. He further states "those are the types of things that sometimes superintendents come in, and they think their job is to do whatever the board wants them to do even if



they know it is not right. They are more concerned about keeping the job than doing the work”.

Integrity and work ethic are both qualities identified by the Statesman as essential qualities to have if one is to attain and remain in the role of school district superintendent. The Statesman shared a story about how he had a secretary that always tried to beat him to work, but she never did. She was baffled based on experience with her previous supervisor as to why the Statesman always seemed to be the first one into the office and the last one to leave at the end of the day. According to the Statesman, and he mentioned this several times during the interview, it is his work ethic that has allowed him to be and remain in the position of superintendent for the past 22 years in total.

The interview switched gears a bit when I asked the Statesman about board relations and how you go about establishing and maintaining good relationships with school board members. He stated:

I guess as much as I can say if you don't understand, how to deal with boards, because the quickest way to be two three years in and out is when you have conflict with your board, and I've had 16 different board members in the 16 years that I've been here. So every year almost it was, is having a reset of the group because you have another person coming in or a couple other people coming in... But I've always believed that if you do your job, and you do it well, people will see that and they will adjust and you don't have to.

The Statesman went on to say that he has always maintained a healthy relationship with the board, collectively and individually, by communicating in a manner they all agree upon and doing so consistently. He further stated that while he has established and maintained positive and healthy relationships with the board, he keeps a healthy distance so to speak. He didn't go out of his way to be friends, and do things like have regular lunches together, or go on golf outings or things of that nature. He stated that it would not be uncommon for him to have a drink with a board member if they were attending a conference, but not with in frequency, and certainly not with the intent of befriending beyond the working relationship. The way the Statesman put it, "I'm not pandering to them, I'm doing the job".

I asked the Statesman to describe his actions of equity leadership in addressing and providing for student success. The Statesman responded that he spent a lot of time trying to ensure that "the teaching staff raised the level of rigor for ALL kids". He discussed how he uses data to determine peaks and valleys, successes and opportunities, down to the individual teacher and individual students. He starts with conversations with principals regarding deficits or lagging performance, who in turn have conversations with individual teachers, and if necessary, the Statesman has conversations with individual teachers also.

The Statesman described efforts to increase the number of students engaging in advanced curriculum by creating individual student profiles. What he found was that "oftentimes students are performing very well and would benefit from greater challenges". The profile is meant to provide criteria for which to identify and

ultimately encourage students to engage in AP and other advanced curriculums. This effort has really been beneficial to not only students, but has been eye opening for teachers as well by allowing them to see that if they really pushed and maintained high expectations for all students, that they really could achieve and accomplish more. He states:

We've increased the number of kids taking AP courses by over 300. And the way that that was done was we literally created a profile of those kids, from teacher recommendations to how well they were already doing in core courses were what the types of things that they wanted to do. And then when we look at that profile we then determine that this kid is a potential AP student, and so they brought the kids in and basically told them, and I was there when they told some of those kids, you're AP potential. And so we've got over 300 kids... and the only way that they can get out of the course is if the principal let them out, so that you don't have a somebody passing judgment on this kid, when three or four teachers said that this kid has potential.

The Statesman insists that in order to have or increase equity you must have and maintain high expectations for all, students, teachers, parents, everyone involved in the system. To further illustrate that point, he discussed an experience during his first superintendency where the football team had great players, "gladiators" is how he referred to them, that could while great on the football field, they weren't offered or even considered for scholarships to major colleges because they weren't making great

grades, or taking classes that would get them to college. The Statesman stated that many students were not even taking college entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT, and the ones that did scored poorly. The district brought in support from an outside entity to help those students prepare so they could perform better on those exams. Further, the Statesman issued a challenge to the coaching staff “that if they could not get students into the space to receive Division 1 scholarship offers, they could no longer coach in the district”. He raised the expectation and supported the desired outcome by taking intentional action to achieve success. He told his story of how he overcame low expectations from his high school counselor when he was a student:

...when I was wanting to go to A&M, I walked into the counselor's office, told her what I wanted to do, and she said you will never make it at A&M. Here's what here's where I would recommend you go... and during my senior year I came back and tapped my ring on her desk and I was a distinguished student my senior year there. I tell our folks I always remember that, and I did not remember it kindly. So if you think you're doing kids a favor by saying that, you're wrong... they don't like you, and they don't like you for a lifetime when you do that, and so that's something that we work on throughout our entire system is to have those expectations for our kids...

I asked the Statesman if he had any insider secrets of the trade to share, and he responded that for those that aspire to enter the role of the superintendent, it is important to research each district you apply to. He told the story of applying for a

position for the first time and never receiving any communication from the district. He attributed the lack of response from the application to not fitting the profile. He had not reviewed the profile of the person that district was seeking prior to applying, and according to him, had he done due diligence in researching the position, he would not have applied as he simply did not meet the profile.

The Statesman's parting advice to those seeking a superintendent position would be to not just go after or take just any job, and when you get there, take the time to find out who the powerbrokers are. Whether silent and in the background, or vocal and out in front, "take the time to know who is connected to who, and where the power brokers lie in regards to what you need to or are trying to accomplish".

### **The Traditional Superintendent's Profile**

The Traditional Superintendent holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) and a master's degree in Educational Administration from Pennsylvania State University. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Florida, completed postdoctoral courses in School Business Leadership at Wilkes University and attended Harvard University Graduate School of Education Leadership Institute for Superintendents.

With over 20 years of experience in educational leadership, The Traditional superintendent has developed a results-oriented reputation for improving academic achievement, working with diverse groups, increasing parent/community involvement, implementing systems-thinking, and providing a positive school and work

environment. He has demonstrated effective leadership skills in standards and performance-based practices, human resource management, fiscal management and school/community partnerships.

On January 13, 2014, the Traditional was appointed as superintendent of his current school district in Virginia. Prior to his current appointment, the Traditional served as the superintendent of a district in North Texas where he oversaw an economically and socially diverse school district with 4500 employees serving 35,111 students, representing 90 countries and speaking over 50 languages on 38 campuses. The position also entailed overseeing the development and management of a \$260 million general fund budget and an approximate \$400 million total budget. His responsibilities included implementing a new multi-year strategic plan for the school district and developing a strategic communications plan for improvement of both internal and external communications. The Traditional led that district through one of its most difficult financial periods resulting from state funding reductions, while maintaining the district's strong AA+ and Aa2 bond ratings. Additionally, the school district earned recognition from the State Comptroller as a five-star district from 2010-2012 for financial management and academic progress (highest rating for improving student achievement while keeping expenditures relatively low).

During his three-year tenure there, the district expanded its Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings and increased the percentage of students taking AP courses by 13.6%, AP exams scores by 23.6%, AP Scholars recognition by 14.4% and the SAT participation rate from 39% to 85%. His system-wide reading and math

extended learning program for grades K-11 provided 85,000 books for summer reading and math enrichment activities. During the 2011-2012 school year, each comprehensive high school began implementation of signature programs as part of 12 career and technical education pathways in the areas of: architecture, construction and engineering (ACE); aviation and biomedical Science; energy and environmental entrepreneurship. The Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses taken by students increased over 50%. Fine arts enrollment also experienced a significant increase in enrollment of approximately 18%. In 2012 and 2013, two of the four Irving ISD high schools received Silver Medal Recognition by U.S. News & World Report as being in the top 8% of more than 21,000 high schools. In 2013, two of the four high schools were also selected for Newsweek's Best High Schools. The district's graduation rate increased from 78% in 2009 to 86% in 2013.

Prior to superintendency in Texas, the Traditional served as superintendent for the Richmond County (Augusta, GA), where he also had two high schools recognized in the top 200 schools in the nation by U.S. News & World Report. Particularly noteworthy were the improvements in academic performance in multiple areas. Along with an increase in the percentage of schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the percentage of students graduating increased from 63.8% to 77%. In addition, seven out of eight comprehensive high schools increased their graduation rate.

He has served as a Regional Superintendent in Philadelphia Public Schools, High School Principal at School Without Walls Senior High School in Washington,

D.C., a public, urban college preparatory school, Sub school Principal in Fairfax County Schools, Director of Athletics and middle school teacher in other school districts.

The Traditional has extensive experience serving on local, state, and national committees and boards of community and business organizations as well as a being a speaker on important educational issues. He has published, contributed or been featured in several professional publications such as Phi Delta Kappa, Executive Education, District Administrator and SMART BUSINESS. He is a life member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and the National Association of Black School Educators.

### **The Traditional Superintendent's Interview**

I originally reached out to the Traditional superintendent via a social media outlet that we are connected in. He responded to my request and asked that I contact his assistant to schedule our phone conference. After a few weeks of trying to pin down a time for us to meet, he was able to grant me 30 minutes to speak with him. Given the very short time frame, I wasted no time getting right to the interview.

I began the interview by asking the Traditional to tell me about himself, his origins. The Traditional is from St. Petersburg Florida and is a graduate of Pinellas County High School. After high school he enlisted in the military for four years, and upon completing his time in the military he attended the University of Florida as undergraduate, Penn State for his Masters and Virginia Tech for his doctorate. The Traditional didn't intend to go into education originally, "but I think education called me".



The Traditional was one for four boys that were raised primarily by their mother. His mother and father separated when he was very young which left his mother to raise him and his three brothers.

So I was raised by my mother for the most part, and my step-father. My brothers unfortunately were subject to drug issues as they were growing up. My mother decided to use education as tool to break that cycle, if you want to use that term, with me. So she was very adamant about me doing better in school. I ended up being a three sport letterman, and was the only of any of her children to go to college.

The Traditional was a middle school teacher and then became a program specialist in Pennsylvania before becoming an administrator. The Traditional didn't take the traditional route into administration however, his first experience and opportunity with administration was actually as an athletic director. An opportunity arose for him to return to a campus as a campus administrator in a non-traditional school. He described the position as a school within a school, or a school with sub-schools. He served as a sub school principal for a few years in the non-traditional school, and then he became a high school principal in a traditional high school.

Following his time as a high school principal, he assumed the position of Regional Superintendent before becoming a superintendent in a small school district. The Traditional stated that he believed that the experience he gained as the district leader in the smaller setting actually helped him prepare to be a superintendent in a large school district. "When you work in a small school district, you have to learn everything, not

that you are going to be an expert at it, but you have to be more involved in all aspects because there isn't anyone else there to do it, so you become knowledgeable about things that most large district superintendents do not".

When asked to describe his identity as an African American male superintendent leading an urban school district, the Traditional superintendent responded:

I am a family man that has worked hard all of my life to be better than good at what I do. As a leader, it is my responsibility to set an example for what should be, and to always act responsibly at all times. I believe in doing what is right for kids, no matter their race or circumstances, and I stand by what I believe. Im not naïve in my dealings with others. I know that being a Black man in this profession comes with certain stigma and speculation about my abilities, but I have been successful throughout my career, and my record speaks for itself. I do get frustrated at times because just when you are gaining traction, something happens to disrupt your flow. But I make no bones about it, I am who I am and I will not make concession for that.

As the discussion commenced, I asked the Traditional to describe what his experience has been as an African American male superintendent leading urban school districts, and he responded:

Well I think we often get opportunities to serve in difficult situations, not sure that we get some of the more high achieving opportunities, that's starting to change a little bit. I don't think we often get the opportunity to

stay long enough to make sure things get fixed. You have to break the egg, and once the egg is ready to be scrambled, a change is made... You're in a political position where you have a lot of pressure and there are constituents that have thoughts and visions about how things should be done. I think you have to surround yourself with a strong team as a superintendent, so you have to depend on the right people, because you can't be an expert in everything. And I think that all has to be driven by the needs of students.

It is important to note that the Traditional is currently serving his third school district in his twelve years as a district superintendent. The national average for district superintendents to serve in a district is three years. Statistically, the Traditional has stayed on pace with the average, but he feels he had finally laid a solid foundation to do some great things in prior districts, but his time was cut short before he could implement some of the plans he had for those districts.

When asked what he feels is some of the significant, personal qualities or values or behaviors of a superintendent that's necessary for leadership and instructional improvement, the Traditional responded that in general, the superintendent has to be committed to doing what is right regardless of political pressures. The Traditional acknowledges that the thoughts, views, and vision of constituents' matter, but if they require you to consider or do something that is not morally right, or in the best interest of kids, then you simply should not do those things.

When it comes to establishing his team, the people that serve on his cabinet,

those who lead the schools from both a central office level as well as the campus level, the Traditional responded:

I think you have to surround yourself with a strong team as a superintendent. You have to depend on the right people...because you can't be an expert in everything. And I think that all has to be driven by the needs of students. So I think knowledge base first of all, for a person, that they actually have the knowledge and skills we need to get things done in that position. And the next quality would be loyalty, and loyalty to doing what's right for students, regardless of who it is, whether it's me or whoever, they put children first.

When it comes to additional obstacles or concerns that he has experienced as a superintendent, the Traditional expressed that people come a myriad of problems, but rarely ever offer or even have any potential solutions. Further, he states that people do not readily employ patience, because oftentimes the matters or issues that people come with are urgent, certainly urgent to them, and “understandably they want quick or immediate resolution to problems, issues, or concerns, that frankly have no quick or easy resolution. In many cases, they just want their issue addressed or problem solved, but don't necessarily want to be a part of the solution”.

When asked to describe the action he takes in terms of his leadership to address equity related to student outcomes, the Traditional spoke very passionately about the challenges facing education, particularly urban education. “There is achievement and there's learning. They may seem to be similar, but achievement focus' on tests, and that's

a part of it, but we also have to provide programs that focus on and provide learning everyday”. The Traditional went on to say that we cannot continue to apply the traditional model to address current urban student needs. He suggests:

we need to move away from the agrarian calendar whereby students attend school for 180 days, for 7 hours per day, and that we have do a better job of addressing the social and emotional needs of students. Many urban school students face challenges far beyond what should be expected of children, and most are void of opportunities to care for the emotional needs they have based on their social circumstances. We are working to provide wrap around services and my district has partnered with community and social services to provide support to families. We have extended learning opportunities for students by extending the school day in a meaningful way, and we’re working to equip teachers and school staff on how to do deal with and address students that experience trauma so that they can better serve their students and meet instructional needs of students with a different perspective.

The district has a partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University intended to better prepare teachers to work in an urban school environment and in urban cities. “It’s a non-traditional teacher education and teacher certification, they also spend two years in a school before they are let go to fully be a teacher of record on their own”.

We discussed the problem of access to the superintendency for African American males, that there are over 14, 000 school districts across the nation, yet there are

relatively few positions held by African American males. The Traditional discussed that he believes that part of the problem is that “frequently African American males are viewed as incapable of handling the rigors of the position, and are often overlooked as a result”. Another factor mentioned by the Traditional is that African American males in particular have to look at the positions they apply for and be realistic about it being a fit for their particular skill set. They should look at the needs of the district they are applying for and be reflective of what they bring to the table to address the situations for which they are applying. He further emphasized that African American males need to be vigilant in pursuing those positions for which they are most qualified as opposed to just trying to get a position. He states:

I think sometimes the problem is we apply for too many positions. You know, and so it looks like we're just applying for anything that shows up, because, you know sometimes the network is smaller than some people realize, and word gets around...so and so applied for this job, and applied for that job... so then the question becomes are they just trying to get a position or do they really want to be here. So they're just trying to get a position rather something where they want to be able to make a difference. The superintendency just like the principalship is about match. You can be a great administrator but if you go to the wrong place, the wrong position, it could be a disaster just like a coach of a professional team or a college team. It's about looking for a match that's gonna make a team, or an organization move.

The Traditional is a part of an Urban Supes Academy with Harvard that is also in partnership with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) that is trying to produce opportunities to help address the issue of access for people of color, particularly African Americans.

As our time for the interview came to a close, I asked the Traditional if he had any parting advice for aspiring African American male superintendents, and he simply restated advice he gave earlier. The advice he offered was to never do things that cross the lines of ethics or the law just to keep a job. Never do anything in the dark and to keep decisions about children honest, and “to always do what's right for kids...period”.

### **The Enforcer Superintendent’s Profile**

Of the participants I interviewed for this study, the Enforcer has had a very different experience as a superintendent. The Enforcer has spent his entire career, which spans over 30 years, in the state of California. He currently leads a school district that is under state receivership due to financial instability. He is the fourth state appointed superintendent for the district in the past three years. However, he was chosen and accepted the position having successfully served in his first superintendency in the role for another California school district, and having successfully led his most recent district (in a traditional superintendent role) to very high levels of academic performance, financial growth, increased student populations, and sound community involvement and support. He initiated Opportunity 21, a strategic plan that introduced a competition within the district for innovative school

redesigns. He also negotiated a labor contract that established a landmark teacher evaluation system that gave teachers a role in evaluating their peers.

The Enforcer began his career in the classroom as a teacher and school administrator. He taught for several years at a high school in San Francisco, and served in various administrative positions throughout the San Francisco Bay Area including principal of a Middle School in San Leandro, principal of a Charter Academy in San Francisco, assistant principal of a High School in Mill Valley, and principal of an Elementary School in San Francisco.

Prior to becoming a superintendent, the Enforcer served as an Area Superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District, the second largest district in California, with 132,000 students.

He holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, an M.A. in Educational Administration, and a B.A. in Liberal Studies, all from San Francisco State University. The Enforcer also is a graduate of the Broad Superintendent's Academy.

### **The Enforcer Superintendent's Interview**

I met the Enforcer about three years ago as a participant of a Superintendent Preparatory Academy in Chicago. The Enforcer was assigned as my coach for the six-month academy. He is a very upbeat, but straightforward person, and as I got to know him, I came to realize that he is very passionate about the work he does as a superintendent. He doesn't speak much about awards and accolades, a very modest person, but has amassed quite a few accomplishments over his career. A busy body, he



is always on the move, so even though I know and have a good relationship with him, it was a little challenging to get a time to speak with him.

Unlike the other participants, I was able to speak directly with the Enforcer to establish a time date and time for our phone interview. Right out of the gate, I ran into technical difficulties that caused us to connect several minutes into our allotted time. However, after explaining the situation to him and apologizing for my tardiness, the Enforcer understood and we got the interview started.

Knowing that I was pressed for time, and also knowing that I already knew quite about the Enforcers background, I decided to forgo the introductory small talk, and get right to the questions I wanted to ask. One of the things I admire about the Enforcer is his frankness. He responds to questions directly, not abrupt or harsh, but honest and direct. I asked the Enforcer to describe his identity as an African American male superintendent, and this is what he said;

I think that when you walk in a room, a lot of people you know, say they don't see color. But I don't see how you don't see color. I think a lot of times when people say they don't see color to me, I say I don't know how you don't see color, you can't see this big African American man standing in front of you? I mean so I get the question, I'm an African American. I'm a male and everybody can see that. But I think there are certain people who have issues with that. Certain people have biases and thoughts about that. But you know, I know who I am. I'm an African American male superintendent and I realize that when I walk

into a room, I realize that when I'm sitting down, I realize that when I'm speaking. And so people have to figure out on their own what they are going to do about that, how they are going to react to that. But I, you know, I have no illusions about the fact that everybody knows I'm a Black man. I just know that some people have certain biases about that and their reactions to that is their reactions to that.

My next question for the Enforcer was how he describes being an African American superintendent leading and urban school district. He responded:

I know people either think you're an angry Black man or you're not going to speak in an articulate manner or you really aren't smart. You know certain people have certain biases and it's not just with education, this is with society and education is just a part of society. So I think, you know, going into the work you have to make some assumptions. You go into the work and you continue to do the work when those biases reveal themselves and you continue to do the work for students. You take those biases into account as you're working with that person or those people. For some people, when you walk in a room, they think you're only there for kids of color and that you're not here for all kids. When I was in...we were at town hall meeting and one lady just said who is gonna fight for our white babies. So in her mind it definitely wasn't me to fight for white kids, I was only there for kids of color in her mind.

The Enforcer attributes his confidence in self and his commitment to his convictions to his upbringing. He stays true to the belief that leadership requires great humility and a willingness to commit selfless acts every day for the commitment to doing the work. He credits his mother and father and community for instilling resilience in him and molding him in a manner that allowed him to grow into a leader from an early age. He also states that he believes that because he is an African American leader that he has to work five times as hard as non-Black, non-male educators. The Enforcer believes that his presence in this work, the work of leading a school district and serving the community and most importantly, the students, comes from a higher calling.

When asked how he describes his acts of equity leadership as relates to student outcomes in his district, the Enforcer stated:

I would say closing the opportunity gap. We focused on the opportunity gap. We believe that the achievement gap was a manifestation of the opportunity gap, and the opportunity gap is actually looking at the actions of adults in the system and what they do for students and what they are not doing for students. So supporting and building up those actions that are great for students and removing those barriers. Getting employees what they need. Putting supports in place to build the capacity by establishing a rigorous, robust professional development for teachers and administrators, and establishing a pipeline academy putting things in place so that they can ultimately support kids and close the opportunity gap.

The Enforcer, a year into taking over the district he currently leads, stated that he is “still in the process of establishing that learner’s culture in the district”. He has taken the past several months to observe and really get to know the situation he is faced with. “You look at all the data that you can and you begin to work with people to fill those gaps and support the things that are providing a successful learning environment where we are able we have effective teachers in place to provide sufficient instruction is ultimately going to be in their schools.” The Enforcer discussed this as a process that occurs in stages, where the first ninety days is really just listening, observing and learning with little to no action, followed by the establishment of a plan to address observed or identified deficits, and then you move to implementation of the plan.

According to the Enforcer, one of the things he learned during the first ninety days, was that there was no previous plan. “There was no plan for professional development, or instructional delivery, no plan for employee succession, or no specific actions to ensure they were building leadership capacity from within”. He also found that there was no plan to address or even maintain suitable facilities. I found it to be interesting that given the status of the district, no plan had been established or articulated with the district and its stakeholders. I asked the Enforcer to describe the situation of the district as it related to him becoming its leader, and this is what he said:

This is a district that had a state administrator, and I'm actually a state administrator, and state administrator means that you're actually the superintendent and the board. Four years ago the district went bankrupt

and the state had to come in and bail out the district. When the state bails out a district the board loses authority and the superintendent is removed and a state administrator is placed into one district. So that happened four years ago. I'm actually the fourth state administrator. The first one lasted about a month. He was fired after a month. The second one was put in place for the remainder of the year. There was a new state administrator for years two and three, he was replaced at the end of year three and I was requested and appointed here.

When asked how he maintains equity in hiring in the district, he stated very simply stated that they just followed their hiring process. He stated that they hire the best candidates for the jobs and that despite the previous troubles of the district, commitment to hiring the most qualified candidates has naturally resulted in maintaining equitable ratios reflective of the student population the district serves.

When asked to provide two to three key dimensions of leadership he has identified during his time as a superintendent, he mentioned professional will, humility, and people who are smart. He discussed “this work is not about us, it's about the kids who are in front of us. As a leader you can stroll around with a feather in your cap, or you can use your authority to make a difference for kids”. The Enforcer went on to describe what he meant about professional will. He states that despite the hard and tiring work required in our profession, professional will is not letting anything stop you from making things happen, ensuring that students are getting the high quality instruction that they deserve.

...And what I'm looking for are people who are humble once again that's the humility piece, humble about this work, hungry same as the professional will... And then smart, you have to be smart about this work, you have to be strategic. We're looking for people who have great minds. I have no problem with being the dumbest person in the room. I'm gonna surround myself with people who were smarter than me. If I'm the smartest person in the room, then what do I need a team for. I want really smart people who are gonna lead this work and push us forward and constantly push our thinking.

I asked the Enforcer to describe what the word success means for his district, however, the answer I received was a bit different than what I expected given my knowledge of the Enforcer. He described the accountability system in his district, governed by the state, whereby you must meet certain indicators in five areas: human resources, community engagement, facilities management, finance, and academics. He described the process a little more in detail, but essentially a rubric applied with a ten-point scale in each category is used to determine a rating. Once the ratings in each category reach a six across the board, authority or responsibility can begin to be transitioned back over to the local school board, and a more normal hierarchy of a board and superintendent mixture or relationship will ensue. I found a particular comment made by the Enforcer at this point to be quite interesting. He said, "You know my job as the state administrator is to work myself out of a job, build capacity in

the district and then eventually return authority to the board. And that's what we're attempting to do here”.

Unlike traditional or normal school district governance structures, where the aim of the superintendent is to perform well enough to maintain his or her employment, the goal in this situation is to do so well that you are no longer needed. One might find or expect that dynamic to be applicable to someone who has retired and is not likely looking to be in a position long term, but I would not expect someone, especially someone that has been highly successful, and with quite a bit of time left in his career before retirement.

At this point, I switched back to asking the interview questions in a sequence that I had originally planned. The Enforcer was Born and raised in San Francisco in an all-African-American area of the city of Hunter's Point. His father was a mailman, and his mother didn't work. The family was basically a lower middle class family. The Enforcer Went to all public schools and actually in high school determined that he wanted to be a teacher. He loved working with students having tutored his friends, and that made him want to be a teacher. He attended San Francisco state to get his teaching credential and then he returned home for his first teaching job in the area he grew up in. The Enforcer taught five years in Hunters Point, but returned to school for his administrators' credential in year three. By year five he obtained his administrators credential and then became a principal. The Enforcer was a principal for 15 years at different levels of elementary middle and high school and then became the district

administrator for a few years, assistant superintendent, area superintendent, and then became a state administrator (superintendent) for the state of California.

The Enforcer attributes his confidence in self and his commitment to his convictions to his upbringing. He stays true to the belief that leadership requires great humility and a willingness to commit selfless acts every day for the commitment to doing the work. He credits his mother and father and community for instilling resilience in him and molding him in a manner that allowed him to grow into a leader from an early age. He also states that he believes that because he is an African American leader that he has to work five times as hard as non-Black, non-male educators. The Enforcer believes that his presence in this work, the work of leading a school district and serving the community and most importantly, the students, comes from a higher calling.

... which is you know this work isn't about you it's from a higher calling.

You know, I grew up Baptist, so for some people that higher calling is religious, for other people it's just the universe or however they describe it, but I think from my background my upbringing, those traits were pushed constantly and ... and so I believe my upbringing as an educator, it really, well I guess it'd be the background, the higher calling piece for me is religion, and God determining that this was the purpose for me. And I think that for each of us if we are not in this, especially education, if you don't have a calling to do this it's definitely gonna wear you out.

To end the interview, the Enforcer advised that aspire to the superintendency should ensure their skills are sharp. He urges to get involved or become a part of an



academy intended to build the skills necessary for the position. The Enforcer also strongly advises for those that aspire to the superintendency to get mentors. He says that it is important to put mentors around you and learn all that you can from them.

The Enforcer reiterated that this nation wants to aspire to get to a point of being a color blind society. However, he states that we must be mindful of the fact that we aren't there, if we are even ever going to get there. He says it is possible to get romanced into thinking that just because a Black or African American was selected for a position, that does not mean that the individuals that selected you are color blind, or that your race does not matter. He says, "and I think that if you go into it with that mindset, you are going... you do it to your detriment". The Enforcer says he thinks that one must recognize that they are African American, and that people do see the color of your skin and make certain assumptions about that.

The Enforcers final words were in regards to politics and political astuteness as he termed it. He warns that you shouldn't become the racial detective by any means, but that race is a factor, and a factor that often affects the political circumstances African American leaders face.

I've heard superintendents say I don't play the politics. Well you may not play them but you better manage them. And then politics also means understanding I'm an African-American in this role, and it means I have to watch what I do and how I do it because I know things will be taken in certain ways. And so you have to be politically astute and politically thinking at all times about how you're going to move forward. If you're

not in your job, you can't make a difference for kids, and you have to be politically astute. Part of that is understanding who you are, understanding the skin you're in, and understanding the moves you need to make in order to make sure things continue to happen for children.

The Enforcer reiterated the importance of finding a mentor. He stated that in order to provide the best effort towards ensuring a quality effort for kids, that you need to surround yourself with the right people, and attach yourself to others that have traveled this path successfully. “Learn from their experiences, ask a lot of questions, and do not be timid in engaging in this work”.

### **Analysis of Findings**

The superintendents involved in this study had similar stories to tell regarding their paths to the superintendency and their experiences since being in the position. Regardless of their length of experience, whether the fourth year millennial superintendent, or the twenty-year veteran statesman superintendent, the commonalities of the individuals emerged. The three predominant themes that were common among the participants are: (1) strong parental influence; (2) emphasis on team; and (3) professional commitment. Each participant discussed and described the influence and impact their parents played in them gaining their focus on education. They each discussed their belief about the importance of building and empowering their teams to do the work that is needed. All participants expressed the importance of their work ethic and commitment to doing the work in the name of students.

## **Strong Parental Influence**

As each participant told their story, it was quite evident that their parents played a major role in shaping the direction for path the lives each participant has taken. Each superintendent spoke of the influence of their mothers in particular. The Millennial superintendent shared a very poignant story of how honesty became very important in his life. Raised in an inner city urban environment by a single mother, the Millennial learned a very valuable lesson about honesty from a situation where he was disobedient to his mother, which resulted in her being hurt that he didn't adhere to her wishes. Twelve years old or so at the time, and certainly not meaning to hurt his mother, the Millennial made a decision to go against his mother's wishes and as a result, he hurt his mother. As he told the story, it was obvious that all these years later, the outcome of the story still affects him today as much as it did when it occurred. The Millennial is adamant the honesty, no matter how difficult or ugly, is the best and only way to go.

The Statesman told the story of how being raised by his mother, a maid raising four children, impacted him. His story of working in the fields and around the farm, in addition to helping his mother with her work as a maid, impacted him in a way that made him want to do well and make his mother proud. He didn't much about his father, only to say that his father left the family when he was young. He also talked about how he never wanted to disappoint his mother as he was able to witness the struggles she had to care for the family as well as the challenges at least two of his siblings posed to her. As the Statesman told his story of how he worked, he stated that

his mother made sure the he took care of his business. He also shared the story of how the community was an extended family and would hold you accountable as well, and if you did not adhere to what was generally expected of all children, the origin of consequences was of little importance.

Both the Traditional and the Enforcer superintendents were both raised in two parent households; the Traditional with his mother and stepfather, and the Enforcer with both biological parents. The Traditional didn't speak very volumes about his upbringing, but was very clear about the influence his mother had on him growing up. Having older siblings that were involved in an affected by poor decisions that led to complications for them as well as their parents, the Traditional's mother was adamant that he would get an education and that he would not travel the path his siblings had taken. It was clear the adamancy of his mother at an early age and throughout his schooling, played a major role in the success he has experienced in life, and how he is raising his own children as well.

The Enforcer, the only of the four that had a traditional two parent experience growing up, having a stay at home mother, and a dad that worked as a mail carrier, was influenced by the support of both parents. His mother, always there to insure that his needs were attended to, including staying on top of his school work, and his father, displaying the discipline of going to work and doing a good job on a daily basis, has led to the consistency and work ethic that the Enforcer adheres to in his work. The enforcer mentioned several times during the interview that he attributes the success he

has experienced in his career to his “upbringing”, from both his parents and the community in which he was raised.

### **Educator Influence**

Research regarding the impact of effective teachers is expanding, and it was evident during the interviews with the superintendents, that particular teachers had a significant influence on them and impacted their decision to enter the profession, some at a very early age. Each superintendent discussed in detail the influence that a former teacher and mentor had on him becoming an educator. The Millennials educator influence was provided by his seventh grade science teacher. The Millennial spoke of Mr. Clem with such reverence and enthusiasm. “And he was just I thought an amazing teacher. And the way in which he conveyed concepts of science and the way in which he taught, is what made me really interested in the content but then also being interested in teaching.” The Millennial credits Mr. Clem, a teacher he had in both middle and high school, as the educator that impacted him the most, and was ultimately the role model that inspired him to become an educator. Ironically enough, the Millennial not only became a teacher because Mr. Clem’s influence, his first teaching assignment was as a middle science teacher.

The Statesman had a similar story as the Millennial. The Statesman’s influential teacher was his Agriculture teacher. According to the Statesman, his teacher impacted many in the community. Revered by many, his teacher was not only a school teacher, he was also a Sunday school teacher, and a positive beacon of hope in the community. Speaking of his teacher, the Statesman shared;

And in that same community was a teacher that I had several good teachers. I mean we had a two room schoolhouse but it was like you had mentioned earlier, that I was determined to be exactly like he was, an Ag teacher. I was determined to go to school and be an Ag teacher. He taught Sunday school and was just an individual, African American individual that everybody in the community looked up to as well and not just our little community but all of the small community schools that eventually consolidated

The Statesman shared that if it had not been for his Ag teacher, he may not have chosen the path that he chose to enter the profession.

The Traditional didn't go into great detail about teachers from his childhood, but he did speak of the influence fellow educators had on him upon becoming a teacher. He was not certain that he belonged in the field of education. However, as a middle school teacher, he found himself always being placed in or assigned to leadership roles. He was encouraged by the school administration to pursue the credentials necessary to advance in the profession, and according to him, had he not followed their guidance, and listened to his heart; he may not have been able to be where he is today.

Much like the Millennial, the Enforcer superintendent was inspired by one of his middle school teachers to become an educator. He found that having the opportunity to not only learn from that teacher specifically, along with the support and guidance of his parents, serving as a peer tutor really gave him direct experience with teaching and he "really enjoyed" that. The Enforcer spoke of the teacher, like all of the others, very passionately, and it was clear that had he not been provided with the support and

guidance from that particular teacher, he may likely have also chosen a different direction.

### **Emphasis on Team**

An acronym for the word team is Together Everyone Achieves (or Accomplishes) More. This sentiment was shared by each superintendent in a manner that suggests that they clearly believe and understand that void of a strong team working together in sequence; success for the districts they lead would not be likely. Each also discussed that establishing the right team is not easy, that you have to work through difficulties together, that you may even have to replace certain members of the team to ensure they are in the right seat on the bus. The Millennial talked about the importance of putting the right people of the team, empowering them to do the work, and leading that effort. He talked about the team remaining true to their core values, and that deviation from that is unacceptable. He puts great value on his team, and acknowledges that he could not do the work that is required in total were it not for the team that has been established.

Similar to the Millennial, the Statesman also discussed team in the same manner stating that you must empower your team to do the work, under your guidance of course, but to do the work nonetheless. The Statesman attributes his discernment in establishing and maintaining a solid team to his varied experiences in almost every situation you can be in as a school district. Further, he seeks to build capacity, and in doing so, members of the team are expected to advance, which given the relative few positions of district leadership in most districts, will require the person to move to a different district at some

point. However, he values the establishment of team by promoting from within, because he feels that those that are legitimately eligible for promotion have been trained in the ways that they must proceed and serve.

The Traditional superintendent stated that he “believes in building a team with a mixture of new talent and internal talent to make sure we get the best that we can”. The Traditional superintendent talked about surrounding yourself with the right people to do the work for kids. He states that the amount of work can be overwhelming even with a team, and that if a superintendent does not lean on his or team to help get the work done, it is an impossible situation, especially in a large district. He mentioned that in smaller districts the opportunity to establish a team is a bit more challenging if the resources are not available. Further, he stated “you can't be everywhere, so you must rely on and lead your team” if you are going to reach the goal of meeting student needs and meet high levels of student achievement.

The Enforcer superintendent says that in making decisions on who to put on his team, he looks for people that humble, hungry, and smart.

You have to be smart about this work, you have to be strategic. We're looking for people who have great minds. I have no problem with being the dumbest person in the room. I'm gonna surround myself with people who are smarter than me. If I'm the smartest person in the room then what do I need a team for. I want really smart people who are gonna lead this work and push us forward and constantly push our thinking.

The Enforcer also discussed what must happen when you put a person in place that may



not be a good fit. He said that while you must establish and rely on your team, you must also be willing to remove people from the team that do not fit. “Sometimes you make the wrong decision, or you have a relational dynamic that just doesn't work, and you have to be willing to make a move when it's necessary.”

### **Commitment to Core Values**

Commitment is defined as the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or activity. Each superintendent in this study discussed the importance of being dedicated and committed to their core values and beliefs, and working in the name of students. Despite the pressures, wherever they may originate, or regardless as to why they exist, the superintendents emphasized the importance of remaining committed to doing what is right for students first.

The Millennial superintendent was very adamant about being honest and really facing the brutal facts of situations. He talked about the importance of helping others see circumstances in situations that they may not readily see or even be able to comprehend, yet exist.

I think that that's important for anybody is to understand one, what are your core values? What are your core beliefs? What are those things that you're willing to compromise versus those things that you absolutely will not compromise and then show people those things. Show people who you are around those things. I am absolutely never ever going to compromise my integrity for anybody. I'm gonna show you that, I'm going to show you that I'm going to tell you the truth even when it's ugly, I'm gonna tell you the truth. I am never ever going to

compromise my will to fight for students who may not necessarily have what they should have based on their circumstances because of their zip code, where they live. I'll never compromise that so I'm gonna show that to people and I'm gonna let people know that that is who I am, and that's where my stance lies.

The Millennial pointed towards his experiences growing up in inner-city Baltimore and the interactions, or lack thereof, he witnessed and experienced as a student and later as an educator. He also referenced that children need us to fight for what is right for them, and that it is vitally important to remain committed to that cause while being true to who he is at all costs.

The Statesman superintendent shared that “you are going to be tested”. He said that being an African American, you will be tested by other African Americans who believe you are there for them. He said you will be tested by “Anglos” who feel that you are not capable of doing the work. He went on to say that “if you stay true to the work and you do it well, eventually what ends up happening is people will forget what you look like because they've seen you and know what they've got.” The Statesman went on to state that no matter the situation, no matter the influences, or even the potential circumstances, he has met with success because he “never compromised his core”. The Statesman also said that it's important that you do the work of the job, not work to keep the job, and that if a person strays away from their core values and beliefs, who they are, they will lose themselves and success will evade them.

The Traditional shared the same sentiments. “In general, you need to be committed to doing what's right regardless. You're in a political position where you have

a lot of pressure, and there are constituents that have thoughts and visions about how things should be done.” He went on to say that it is critical to do what is right for students, and he urged to never do anything in the dark. He discussed loyalty in terms of leading the team to do what is right for students. “If its the right thing to do, then you do the right thing, period.”

The Enforcer superintendent discussed the importance of being politically astute, and think from a political standpoint as well as a practical standpoint to ensure that you address problems proactively and effectively while remaining true to who you are and what you stand for. He said, “and part of that is understanding who you are, understanding the skin you're in, and understanding the moves you need to make in order to make sure things continue to happen for children”. He urged not to remain committed to who you are, what you stand for, and to never compromise your beliefs. “I think this work is not about us, it's about the kids who are in front of us. We have to keep that in mind at all times.”

## **Summary**

Each participant included in this study expressed how parental influence affected their personal character and has resulted in the person each has become as individuals and as leaders. Each expressed an appreciation for the values instilled in them by their parents, and while there was variance among the four in terms of the structure of their family units, as well as differences in the types of environments in which each was raised, the foundations of care set the landscape for their lives, and thus, they go about their careers with care and adherence to the values and qualities instilled in them from

their youth.

It has been said, and it may make certain sense as such, that educators shape the world by how they help fill the minds and form the perspectives of those they lead. Thus, educators can have a profound impact on students, and for the participants included in this study, it was a teacher that sparked the fire in them to aspire to become educators themselves. The participants, in their own individual ways, expressed that becoming an educator was their calling, but had it not been for the educators that impacted them as youth, they may likely have chosen a different path.

Team; together everyone achieves more! Each superintendent expressed the great value and importance of establishing a strong team. They each in their own, but similar way, expressed that without the knowledge, experience, and commitment of their teams, the opportunity to achieve success would be greatly diminished if not impossible.

Finally, being true to who you are and what you believe, your core values, is an aspect of leadership expressed by each superintendent. Each participant told their story of what they value, and how those values drive their actions and interactions as leaders. Standing firm and not compromising on what you believe is an aspect of leadership expressed by all the participants as non-negotiable.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine and interpret the life experiences and leadership practices of four African American male superintendents leading urban school districts across the nation. The quantity of specific studies regarding African American males and the superintendency is limited, and this study is intended to expand the voices of African American male superintendents, inform African American males that aspire to the position of superintendent, as well as encourage African American males that currently serve in the position of urban school district superintendent.

In an attempt to understand the life experiences and leadership practices of those four administrators, I began with these research questions as guides:

1. How do African American male superintendents in urban school districts describe their identities?
2. How do African American male superintendents describe being a leader in an urban Public School District?
3. How do African American male superintendents in urban school districts describe their acts of equity leadership related to student outcomes?

Using semi-structured, face to face, virtual (online) and phone interviews, I investigated these questions in-depth, with the four superintendents. I also investigated the questions through the collection of data received from observations of the superintendents, audiotapes, and recorded field notes. After having the data collected

from the interviews transcribed, I compared the transcripts from each participant side by side and put them into categories using number codes.

Using literature I felt relevant to the study of leadership of African American male superintendent's, I explored leader persona and individual identity, convergence as a function of Critical Race Theory, Black male leader identity development, historical perspectives on African American superintendents, and equity leadership practices of successful superintendents. My study revealed that obtaining and remaining in a position of district leadership was more challenging for African American men than their Anglo American counterparts as they face challenges unique to the position as it relates to their backgrounds, experiences, and race.

Using identified educational leadership practices (Thomas, 2003) as a frame, I reviewed the characteristics expressed by superintendents that exemplified such qualities as setting and maintaining a clear vision, application of strong leadership, persistent focus, political astuteness, and individual accountability, to ascertain the depth to which these qualities applied to the participants involved in this study.

In addition, I considered the specific circumstances that superintendents in diverse settings must address. One of the greatest challenges for superintendents, particularly urban superintendents, is to maintain acceptable levels, or make substantial improvements in the academic achievement of our nation's most susceptible children. The role of the superintendent requires him to unite parents, educators, school boards, and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional purpose.

## **Summary**

As the findings of the study are presented, the guiding questions serve as a

focal point of the research. In this next section, individual identity descriptions of the African American male superintendents included in this study are discussed (see chapter 4 for greater details) along with descriptions of what African American male leadership entails as leaders of urban school districts. Finally, equity leadership is discussed as identified by the participants in this study in regards to attaining successful outcomes for students attending urban schools.

### **African American Male Leader Identity**

The first research question posed, “How do African American male superintendents in urban school districts describe their identities?” While each superintendent had a different background, due in part to age differences among the participants, there were common elements across each story. Common, one might say, cultural values have led to the identities reflected in the lives and the work of each superintendent. According to Marcia (1993), leadership persona is developed in four stages, the first being identity foreclosure, which begins in childhood and is initiated by parental or guardian influence. The experiences shared by the participants in this study revealed that each experienced a positive and lasting influence from their parents, which supports Marcia’s (1993) assertion.

The Millennial, the youngest of the participants, expressed confidence in himself rooted in the knowledge and understanding of who he is and what he stands for. The Statesman superintendent expressed the importance of not only knowing who you are and remaining true to your core, but to also be aware of those with you are working with. He expressed the importance of acknowledging the relationships and connections of those around you that are silent players in the arena. He states that many people, who

are seldom if ever heard from, exert great influence, and it is important to stand firm in what you believe, because you will be tested. This is reflective of Fielder's work exemplified by the concept of situational control which states that situations require different leadership styles and is dependent upon the factors that influence the situation (Bolden et. al., 2003; Ellyson, Gibson, Nichols, & Doerr, 2012).

The fourth tenet of Critical Race Theory asserts that the dominate society racializes different minority groups at different times in regards to its needs (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2013). The Traditional superintendent had much support from family growing up, as did the others, but his family experienced the harsh realities of substance abuse that plague society today. He not only had to transcend the barriers of race in his ascent into leadership, but he had to handle societal and relational factors as well. He made mention of being clear about who you are and what you want. He told a story of knowing or believing that he was not considered for positions due to his race, and he expressed that he was okay with that by saying, "thank God I didn't get that job".

The Enforcer Superintendent addressed his identity as an African American male leader a bit more in depth than the others by addressing the elephant in the room and by viewing his position as a Black man very clearly. He went further by expressing that he would not let others off the hook so to speak, by allowing the focus to be on him or his race, but that keeping the work and the tasks at hand in the forefront of his efforts.

African American Male Theory contends that Black men are born with intrinsic aspirations equipping them with limitless capacity and imminent determination for morality and intelligence (Bush & Bush, 2013). "African American Male Theory



embraces resilience theory and vehemently opposes deficit paradigms, thinking, and practice” (Bush & Bush, 2013). Essentially, each superintendent possesses the ability to resiliently rise above any negative perceptions of their abilities as leaders, and forge forward with confidence and belief in themselves and the teams they lead in an effort to do their best job for kids by following the example set forth for them in life, and by adjusting to the fluid situations they experience as African American male superintendents.

### **Urban School District Leadership**

During the 1970’s African American superintendents began to be appointed to urban school districts in larger number, and like today, that role came with higher expectations and implications for providing greater hope for the African American community (Jackson, 1995). Urban school districts led by African American males have historically experienced greater challenges than suburban and rural counterparts. These individuals were typically appointed to urban districts riddled with severe challenges precluded by inadequate financial resources and well-developed reservoirs of unmet needs (Scott, 1980). While this may be the situation in many cases, the participants in this study vaguely mentioned such challenges, however, they referred to the responsibilities that are required of them as school district leaders, not discounting their race or ethnicity, but wholeheartedly embracing the work that is needed in their positions. Each participant has addressed the challenges associated with urban school district leadership in separate, but very similar ways. Education in the US requires leadership intent upon addressing the social issues that plague our nation’s schools

(Dantley & Tillman, 2010). The Millennial is intent upon working with the community to garner support for the initiatives of the district. He is very intent on being accessible to and inclusive of the community, a concept addressed by Furman (2012). He believes that honesty and transparency are vital in leading his school district. According to the Millennial superintendent, it allows the community to see you as accessible and approachable, and gives them a sense that you are reliable and trustable. Being transparent as an African American leader gives people the opportunity to see that you have everyone's best interest at heart and that you are committed to doing what is right in the best interest of students and community in which you serve (Furman, 2012).

The Statesman believes that integrity in his leadership is one of the things that has allowed him to be successful for so long. He states that because he is a man of his word, and follows through on the things he says he will do, along with treating everyone no matter who they are, has made the difference in his success in leadership. Banks (2010) asserts that integrity, is a character trait that focuses on what a person does, and how he or she does it. The Statesman superintendent says that superintendents that are not willing or courageous enough to do what is right are “more concerned about keeping the job than doing the work”. The work of superintendents must be plausible and credible (Banks, 2010). The qualities of vision, integrity, humility, and commitment are just a few of the traits identified by Vargo (2005) that individuals must possess in order to be considered successful in the superintendency.

The Traditional Superintendent believes that effective educational leaders have a strong belief in the value of all children and a keen sense of mission to raise student

achievement. He states that the work of district leaders, particularly urban school district leaders, must “be driven by the needs of students”, a concept supported by Van Knippenberg and Stamm (2012).

The element of resilience and tenacity resonated in the Enforcer superintendent. His belief in what is required to be successful as an urban school district leader is predicated on the idea that the leader must be relentless and will not allow anything from stopping them in insuring that the students receive the best quality education that they deserve. Banks (2010) asserts that a person’s commitment is exemplified in his or her actions, and communicates what person’s priorities are. Further, Owens and Ennis (2005) assert that leaders are encouraged by the philosophy of “I must do something” rather than “something must be done”. Resilient, smart, and strategic are the main elements necessary for success according to the enforcer superintendent. It is important for urban school district leaders to build vision and set direction, understand and develop people, establish or re-establish systems for efficiency, and they must manage the instruction program by actively participating or living in the learning (Leithwood et al, 2008).

### **Equity Leadership**

According to Dantley and Tillman (2010), “the concept of social justice focuses on . . . those groups that are most often underserved, underrepresented, and undereducated and that face various forms of oppression in schools”. Each superintendent in this study expressed their desire to ensure that all kids have access to the highest quality education that they can provide. The Millennial superintendent

expressed that his desire is to ensure all kids had the opportunity to learn based on his own experiences as a student growing up. He knew that things were different for him as a student and he expressed knowing that it was not right, even at that time. As a result he not only operates with an ethic of care, he looks for and hires school leaders that exhibit an ethic of care. This approach requires the leader to take personal responsibility in the growth and success of the organization, and in this case, the school district they lead (Owens & Ennis, 2005). According to Noddings (1992), teachers who profess an ethic of care within their work, view themselves as responsible for empowering their students. The caring ethic suggests that the leader approaches the needs of the subordinate from the (subjective) perspective of “I must do something” rather than the more objective “something must be done” approach (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Leaders are encouraged by this philosophy to perform conscious acts of “being with” and “doing for” for the sake of those they are responsible for leading (Owens & Ennis, 2005). This approach requires the leader to take personal responsibility in the growth and success of the organization, and in this case, the school district they lead (Owens & Ennis, 2005).

The Statesman provided an additional example of “transforming leadership” (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013) by providing and ensuring equitable practices when he detailed a situation he experienced during his first superintendency. Upon arriving in the district, he came to find that there was virtually no professional development planned or provided for teachers. Teachers had not been to professional development in quite some time. The only funding for professional development that existed in the district was for the coaches of the football team. The Statesman, also dealing with climate and

morale concerns, knew he had to address the matter, but also knew that because of the circumstances, he could not just reallocate the funds appropriated for the athletic coaches. He brought in professional development, and sent staff to professional development opportunities that were provided by the Regional service center, which made almost an immediate impact on morale. Teachers felt a sense of value, and as a result, the climate of the district began to become more positive. Were it not for the leader identifying the source of the problem, and then doing something about it, the situation in that particular district may not have changed, thus the plight of students may only have worsened. Bass (1985), and Bolden et. al. (2003) assert that transformational leaders may increase followers confidence, and heighten their expectations and value, while instilling behavioral changes based on their actions as a leader.

During the last decade and half, school accountability, impacted largely by school staff, has been emphasized to a great degree (Daly & Finnigan, 2012). To this end, the Enforcer Superintendent emphasized the role and intentionality that he applies through the hiring process. He discussed addressing equity by applying specific look fors in the people that are hired in an effort to be more responsive to the needs of his students (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Weiner, 1999). He discussed looking for people that have a passion for the work, that are hungry for ensuring the success of the students. He looks for people that are intent on ensuring that every child has access to a quality education. The Enforcer expressed that this mindset became the predominate outlook of all employees in his previous district, and he attributed their success to the relentless resilience of the staff district wide that was intent upon the success of ALL students

(Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). By the same token, the Traditional superintendent discussed in his interview that he seeks to hire people that are willing to do what is right for all kids, not matter the circumstances. This level of commitment comes at a cost when one considers the relatively short life span of the urban school district superintendent. To put it in the Traditionals words, “I don't think we often get the opportunity to stay long enough to make sure things get fixed”.

## **Conclusion**

African American male identity, urban school district leadership, and equity leadership practices that positively affect all students were the common elements identified by the school district superintendents included in this study. While no general formula for success exists, the commonalities of successful superintendents, participants in this study in particular, provide a foundation and a structure for which one can use to establish a direction or path in which to lead. Success is not imminent, rather it is intentional. The African American men included in this study all had similar stories to tell, and the particular elements of their success stories were virtually the same despite experiencing them at different stages, different districts, and different states.

The African American men in this study, each individually exceptional and successful in their own right, serve in positions seldom held by people that look like them in relation to the more than 14,000 opportunities to do so in this country (NCES, 2011). One purpose for engaging in this research was to identify the practices, actions, thoughts, and beliefs of the African American male superintendents serving urban school districts, and how they themselves interpret their identity as diverse school

district leaders. Through this study I found that the superintendents employed situational leadership (Bolden et. al., 2003; Ellyson, Gibson, Nichols, & Doerr, 2012) to address the myriad of challenges they face. They do not allow themselves to be defined by their positions; rather they place great pride in, and honor their responsibilities as educational leaders who have devoted their lives to providing a quality education for their students. Each understands and values the importance of establishing a shared vision for their districts, and empowering their teams to lead. The superintendents expressed importance in collaborative leadership inclusive of all stakeholders while they embraced the responsibilities carried by the positions they hold (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013).

The passion and excitement the superintendents exhibited during the interviews were a testament to the importance of the work educators engage in on a daily basis. This work reaches far beyond the regular nine to five day, and transcends the boundaries of a regular Monday through Friday work week. The stories shared by each superintendent left an indelible impression upon me as an African American educator. The thoughts, expressions, and sometimes emotions conveyed by the superintendents gave me a clear view into who they are, how they lead, and what they are about as African American men first and foremost, and urban school district leaders.

The stories (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004) shared by the superintendents clearly conveyed that the main priority of their position is to ensure that every student has access to a quality education. As the ultimate leader for their district, they inspire and support principals to believe in and care about each student (Nodding, 1992). The

superintendents in collaboration with their board and staff develop policies and procedures to ensure inclusive practices for their students. Each superintendents story revealed their desire to put kids first, but also that they valued maintaining a bond with district employees to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust (Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014). Each superintendent's story detailed the importance of their work ethic and the influence it has in their positions. Resilience and relentless effort also arose as characteristics consistent among all participants (Bush & Bush, 2013). They sought to secure high performers, both internally and externally, to serve on their leadership teams and they empower their teams to do the work required with genuine care and concern for all involved. The stories shared by the superintendents' displayed characteristics of being empathetic and supportive; employing strong people skills and maintaining open communication; strong organization; and serving as "advocates" for the students entrusted to them. The superintendents expressed importance of acting in a fair and impartial manner with employees, and all were adamant regarding the need to maintain their integrity; operating transparently and with total honesty despite potential consequences(Bjork, Kowalski, & Brown-Ferrigno, 2014).

The stories shared by each superintendent were so compelling that I found myself enthralled in their words, and found it difficult to refrain from carrying the conversations beyond the time allotted for the interviews. I found the stories of each superintendent to be inspiring. Dedicated, caring, relentless, successful, yet humble servants are just a few adjectives that can be applied to describe these talented African American male leaders. The wisdom of experiences shared by each, told a



story of endurance, motivation, pride, humility and ultimate self-confidence in their ability to lead and serve their districts. During each interview and story told, I found great similarities and parallels in my experiences as compared to theirs. The characteristics of relentlessness, perseverance, caring, and a sense of efficacy resonated with me based on my experiences as I listened to their stories. Like each superintendent, faith in God and obedience to biblical doctrine, sets my direction and orders my steps. Like the Traditional superintendent, I did not initially set out to become an educator, but upon realizing that it was not up to me, it was simply my calling, the rewards for being obedient have been remarkable. Aspects of each superintendent's story seem to be cut and pasted from my life. There is certainly an element of many are called but few are chosen, and while God took us all on different paths to get where we are now, the work each does as the leader of their district, is ordained by God.

Transformational leaders employ an "ethic of care" theory to motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task (Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2010). These leaders are focused on the performance of group members, but also want each person to fulfill his or her potential. Leaders with this style often have high ethical and moral standards. While a compilation of leadership theories combines to establish each of the leaders represented in this study, the ethic of care exhibited by each is in embedded in the foundation of the leadership provided by each. However, the convergence of leadership theories detailed in Chapter I of this study can be seen and was heard in the story provided by each superintendent that participated in

this study. Whether the work of Marcia (1993) regarding Leadership Persona Theory, Fiedler's (1960) Contingency Theory, and Bass' (1985) Transformational Leadership Theory, all are germane in combination to this study. In each superintendent story I found that the leadership persona of each was guided and shaped by other influences that began with their upbringing and materialized in stages throughout their development culminating in the type of leader each is today.

According to the Fiedler Contingency Model, introduced in the mid-1960s by Fred Fiedler, a scientist who studied the personality and characteristics of leaders, there is no single best method of leadership. Rather, a leader's effectiveness is based on the situation which results from two factors – "leadership style" and "situational control" (Bolden et. al., 2003). Each superintendent described multiple accounts of employing situational leadership in their work. They recognized, acknowledged and expressed that they had to be flexible and respond appropriately, differentiating to address the myriad of matters of which they deal, and with the variance of people with whom they work.

Perhaps the convergence of Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2012) with African American Male Identity development (Bush & Bush, 2013) combines to provide a more thorough personification of the stories provided by the superintendents included in this study (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). The foundation of CRT is based in the realities of lived experiences. Thus, the personal stories and counter stories of the individuals included in this study are critical elements within the CRT framework. . Bush &

Bush (2013) assert that African American boys and men bear an innate inclination for self-determination, and possess limitless capacity for morality and intelligence. African American Male Theory opposes deficit thinking and practice, and thus dispels ideas of innate biological or cultural differences (Bush & Bush, 2013). Rather, according to AAMT, social and educational challenges experienced by Black men stem from socially constructed systems. Through the stories and counter stories of African American male superintendents, one may find those elements of resilience and persistence that contribute, and perhaps, define success for this somewhat marginalized group.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study:

1. Access to the superintendency for African American males is of particular significance. Superintendent preparatory programs specifically tailored to providing access to the position for people of color, African American males in particular, should be expanded with a focus on detail and support with considerations and action steps that introduce individuals to the sphere whereby access limits are less of a factor in attaining positions.
2. Frequent attrition or turnover in the position, appears problematic. While it is possible for these phenomena to be attributed to several different factors, access to mentors for newly appointed superintendents may be of great benefit. Job shadowing opportunities for aspiring superintendents may also prove beneficial as it will provide practical learning opportunities in real world situations for those seeking the position.

3. Interpersonal and relational skills are critical characteristics of successful superintendents. Professional development geared towards public and community relations will be beneficial in helping superintendents establish meaningful and sustainable connections with the community and garner support for district initiatives more likely to result in positive outcomes.
4. Public schools are experiencing greater levels of diversity and the leadership of the school systems should be reflective of those they serve. Diverse leadership from the superintendent position could enhance learning experiences and provide opportunities for expanded perspectives and special insights. Further, the opportunity for students of color to observe and witness leadership provided by someone with which they may identify with, could go a long way in encouraging them towards greater opportunities of success for themselves.
5. Studies specific to diverse leadership in the role of the superintendent are needed. Research conducted specific to African American male leadership in public schools is of need and would benefit those that aspire, African American males, to the position with insight regarding not only the generalities of the role, but what they may encounter as African American males serving in this capacity

### **Implications for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommendations for further research:

1. This study included the voices of four African American male

superintendents from across the nation. While this is a national study, it would be beneficial to replicate this study to include additional voices and stories from urban superintendents in states other than Colorado, Texas, Virginia, and California.

2. Factors of race, social status, and gender combine to affect the identities of African American male leaders. Research purposely focused on these factors may be helpful in further highlighting the effect these factors have in defining the position of African American males in the role of the superintendent.
3. Studies regarding African American males in the role of the superintendent are few in general. Individuals employed in the position, typically inherit positions in districts riddled with challenges and problems that are not favorable for educating students successfully. Study focused on the reasons or rationale of why this is the situation for African American males that seek the superintendency could provide insight into this phenomenon.
4. Access to the superintendency for African American males is of concern given the number of public school districts in the United States in comparison to the relatively few African American males currently employed in positions. Study on recruitment and preparation provided at the university level could provide insight that may improve the number of African American males that are employed in the position.
5. The experiences of African American males in contrast to African

American female superintendents, whom occupy a larger number positions than their male counterparts, and seemingly have better access to the position, may be helpful in identifying causal factors of gender that prohibit or limit opportunities of African American males, further such study may reveal similarities and differences between the two race specific genders.

As an African American male educator who aspires to become a school district superintendent, the stories of the four men included in this study have proven to be very informative, consistent, and powerful as I seek to become a leader such as they.

Having been an urban school district educator for the past twenty years has allowed me a direct view of the challenges and successes experienced in urban school districts. The work of educators is truly the most important work of our time, and like times past, the outlook for education, particularly urban education, is in a state of jeopardy resulting from political agendas, individual biases, and national separation sparked by racial differences. I encourage educators everywhere to be and act courageously and to be relentless in the work we do for our students and the communities in which we serve. Success can be perpetual but requires endless effort, innovative thinking, genuine care for others, and unwillingness to fail.

It is my hope that those like me that read this study, become inspired and motivated to forge forth in pursuing this path. Further, it is my hope that this study also informs those that hold positions of influence that can aide and support,

will be inspired to do so.

Finally, there are many stories being established by those in leadership in our country's schools. While the stories may not have been written to this point, it is my hope that this study inspires conversation around the topic, and motivates greater actions in the support and service to students and the communities in which they live.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

African American Male Superintendents in Urban School Districts: National Stories of Success

#### **Personal Information**

1. Tell me something about yourself.
2. How many years of elementary/secondary teaching experience did you have prior to becoming a superintendent
3. How many years have you been employed as a superintendent in this district (in others)?
4. How would you describe your identity as an African American Male superintendent?

#### **Qualities/Effectiveness**

1. What do you feel are some of the significant personal qualities, values, and behaviors necessary for leadership and instructional improvement?
2. What do you think are some of your strong qualities as a leader (superintendent) that has helped you in your leadership position?
3. Please share some of the important life experiences that you have had which facilitated your choice to become a superintendent?
4. How would you describe the experience of being an African American Male superintendent leading an urban school district?
5. What interpersonal dynamics do you feel impacted your effectiveness as a leader? (How were you motivated toward becoming a leader in education?)
6. What role, if any, did your upbringing play on the way you lead?
7. What values, interests, goals, and beliefs influence the way you conduct yourself, personally and professionally?
8. Please describe some to the obstacles or restrictions that cause you the most concern as you try to carry out your duties as superintendent?

9. How has your personal life been affected by your decision to pursue a position in leadership?

10. Should the superintendent role be redefined and its multiple responsibilities distributed among other assistant superintendents, school administrators, and teachers?

### **Impact of Effective Leadership**

1. As superintendent, how did you go about establishing a successful learning environment for your district?

2. Please describe some of the approaches/techniques you used in gaining success for your school district?

3. How would you describe your acts of equity leadership related to student outcomes (what acts do you attribute to the academic success of urban students)?

4. From your experiences as a superintendent, name 2-3 key dimensions of leadership for sustained reform- the habits of mind and heart- that enable leaders to guide successful change over the long term. Describe these in the context of your concrete experiences as a district superintendent.

5. Generally speaking, do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea to hold school principal accountable for student standardized test scores at the building level? Why or why not?

6. How should superintendents measure the success of their district? Is high stakes testing a viable answer?

7. If superintendents play an important part in the success of their district, what are their secrets and what are the limits to their powers?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PHONE SCRIPT**

Hello, my name is Isaac Carrier. I am a doctoral student at Texas A&M University and I am conducting a study on African American male superintendents in urban school districts. In order to get more information about this topic, I would like to interview six African American superintendents that lead urban school districts from across the nation. The interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be at a location of your choice, or will be conducted virtually (online). The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

All information gathered during the study will be confidential. I will be the only person with access to your consent form, which links your name with the subject number. Your identity will be disguised through this specific coding. In order to get exact information from you, and increase the strength of the study, you will be audio taped in the 60 to 90-minute interview session (video and audio for online session).

Your name will be pre-coded to the recording tape that will be used to record the interview session. The transcriptions (writing down from the tape what you said) will also be coded in order to further protect your confidentiality. Written reports may entail the use of quoted material. At the conclusion of this study, the information gathered and audio/video tapes, identifiable only by subject number, will be stored in a locked file that only I will be able to access. The information obtained from this research will be used for the publication or educational purposes of this researcher only and not for any other purpose.

If you agree to talk with me, all information will be kept confidential and you can ask questions or stop at any time during the interview. Understand that if there are any problems or questions in connection with your participation of this study, you may contact Dr. Novella Carter, the faculty advisor for this project, at Texas A&M University at (979) 845-3211 or [ncarter@tamu.edu](mailto:ncarter@tamu.edu). This research has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participation in this study.

Do you have any further questions?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **CONSENT FORM**

#### **Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program**

##### **Consent Form**

**Project Title:** African American Male Superintendents in Urban School Districts:  
National Stories of Success

**You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Isaac Carrier, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.**

##### **Why Is This Study Being Done?**

The purpose of this study is to examine and interpret the life experiences and leadership practices of Ten African American male superintendents leading urban school districts across the nation. The goal is to use to discourse to determine the constructed meanings of their personal and professional acts of leading as it relates to diverse school districts.

##### **Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a prominent African American male superintendent that is successfully leading an urban school district.

##### **How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?**

Ten people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study nationally.

##### **What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?**

No, the alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

##### **What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?**

Your participation in this study will last up to 90 minutes and includes one visit. The procedures you will be asked to perform are as follows:

The visit will last up to 90 minutes. During the visit I will ask questions from an interview protocol/questionnaire. In order to get exact information from you, and increase the strength

of the study, you will be audio and or video recorded in the up to 90-minute interview session.

Your name will be pre-coded to the recording that will be used to record the interview session. The transcriptions (writing down from the recording what you said) will also be coded in order to further protect your confidentiality. Written reports may entail the use of quoted material. At the conclusion of this study, the information gathered, identifiable only by subject number, will be stored in a locked file that only I, and the Principal Investigator Novella Carter will be able to access.

**Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?**

The researcher will make an audio and/or video recording during the study so that your responses to the questions posed will be accurately recorded. If you do not give permission for the audio/video recording to be obtained, you cannot participate in this study.

Indicate your decision below by initialing in the space provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for audio/video recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for audio/video recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

**Are There Any Risks To Me?**

The things that you will be doing are no more/greater than risks than you would come across in everyday life.

**Are There Any Benefits To Me?**

There is no direct benefit to you by participating in this study. What the researchers find out from this study may help to enlighten educators regarding the plight of the African American male superintendents in urban school districts. African American male educators who wish to become superintendents can use this research to gain insight from existing African American male superintendents as well as, aspiring and incumbent African American male superintendents can also learn from this study by reflecting upon their own experiences.

**Will There Be Any Costs To Me?**

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.



**Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?**

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Isaac Charles Carrier and Dr. Novella Carter will have access to the records.

Information about you and this consent form will be stored in locked file cabinet.

**Who may I Contact for More Information?**

You may contact me Isaac Charles Carrier to tell about a concern or complaint about this research at 281-636-7496 or [icarrier@tamu.edu](mailto:icarrier@tamu.edu).

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

**What if I Change My Mind About Participating?**

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on you.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

**I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.**

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

---

Printed Name

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Date

**INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:**

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

---

Signature of Presenter

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Date

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Printed Name

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Date

## APPENDIX D

### African American Superintendents 2016

Name	District, City and State
1. Mr. Robert Aaron	Dawson, Ga
2. Dr. Darryl Adams	Thermal, Ca
3. Dr. Tiffany Anderson	Topeka, Kansas
4. Dr. Lynda Andre	Edwardsville, IL
5. Dr. Eric Andrew	Campbell, Ca
6. Dr. Rosa Atkins	Charlottesville, City School
7. Dr. Garnell Bailey	Pleasantville, NJ
8. Mr. Charles Barron	Drew, MS
9. Sharonica L Hardin-Bartley, Phd, PHR	School District of University City
10. Tonja Bearman	Camden, NJ
11. Dr. Dana T Bedde	Richmond, VA
12. Dr. Mark Bedell	Kansas City, MO
13. Willie J. Bell, Ed.D	Franklin, Virginia
14. Dr. Ramona Bishop	Vallejo, CA
15. Dr. Melinda Boone	Norfolk, VA
16. Dr. Michele Bowers	Lancaster, CA
17. Dr. Daniel Boyd	Hayneville, AL
18. Dr. Elie Bracy, III	Portsmouth, VA
19. Mr. Darin Brawley	Compton, CA
20. Ms. Willie “Toni” Breaux	Bogalusa, LA
21. Randy Bridges, Ed.D	Florence, SC
22. Herman Brister, Ed.D	Baker, LA
23. Carrie Brock	Kingstree, SC
24. Dr. Warletta Brookins	Hopkins Park, IL

25. Dr. Jacqueline Brooks	Tuskegee, AL
26. Dr. Luvelle Brown	Ithaca, NY
27. Dr. Sybil Knight-Burney	Harrisburg, PA
28. Fred T Butcher	Natchez, MS
29. Dr. Daryl Camp	Riverbank CA
30. Dr. James Carter	Eutaw, AL
31. Dr. Kriner Cash	Buffalo, NY
32. dr. Torrance Choates	Livingston, AL
33. Dr. Constance Collins	Round Lake, IL
34. Veronica Conforme	Detroit, MI
35. Sharon L. Contreras	Greensboro, NC
36. Dr. Eric Cunningham	Halifax, NC
37. Ms. Myrna Corley	East Cleveland, OH
38. Mr. William Crockett	Mound Bayou, MS
39. Dr. Beverly Culley	Benoit, MS
40. Mr. Arthur Culver	East St. Louis, IL
41. Dr. Gloria Davis	Chicago, IL
42. Mr. King Davis	Houston, Texas
43. Dr. Blondean Davis	Matteson, IL
44. Lisa Davis	Hazelhurst, MS
45. Joseph Davis	Florissant, MO
46. Mrs. Ruth Denson	Marvell AR
47. Mrs. Kimberly Carter P. deVault, Ed.S	Battle Creek, MI
48. Dr. Ralph Draper	Houston, Texas
49. Mss. Dennis Dupree	Clarksdale, MS
50. Mr. Will Hector Jr.	San Jose, CA
51. Dr. Benjamin Edmondson	Ypsilantui, MI
52. Dr. Cederick Ellis	Shaw, MS

53. Dr. Donald Evans	Berkeley, CA
54. Dr. Donnie Evans	Paterson, NJ
55. Mrs. Sabrina Boykins-Everett	Thomasville, GA
56. Ms. Jemessyn Foster	Crawfordville, GA
57. Christopher Furdge	Webb, MS
58. Daniel Gallagher, Ed.I	Bound Brook, NJ
59. Dr. Aaron Geter	Irvington, GA
60. Mr. J.R. Green	Winnsboro, SC
61. Dr. Theodis Lamar Greene	Shreveport, LA
62. Mr. Walter Gonsoulin	Fairfield, AL
63. Dr. Cederick Gray	Jackson, MS
64. Jennifer Gil	Springfield, IL
65. Ms. Johnnie Grimsley	Fort gaines, GA
66. Dr. Neely Hackett	Irvington, NJ
67. Irving Hamer	Memphis, TN
68. Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton	Mount Vernon, NY
69. Dr. Anthony Hamlet	Pittsburgh, PA
70. Mr. Lloyd Hamlin	Surry, VA
71. Mr. Al Harper	Elmont, NY
72. Dr. David Harris	DeSoto, Texas
73. Marnie Hazelton	Roosevelt, NY
74. Dr. John H. Heard	Marion, AL
75. Ms. Rosemary Hendricks	Bellwood, IL
76. Dr. Philip W.V. Hickman	Columbus, MS
77. Dr. D. Ray Hill	Macon county, Georgia
78. Dr. Teresa Hill	South Holland, IL
79. Dr. William Hite	Philadelphia, PA
80. David Hobby	Clayton, AL

81. Mr. Alfred Hogan	Turrell, AR
82. Dr. Barbara Jenkins	Orlando, FL
83. Mr. Sammie Ivy	Rolling Fork, MS
84. Dr. Delia Jackson	Plymouth, NC
85. Lisa F Jackson	Bayboro, NC
86. Dr. Luvenia Jackson	Jonesboro, GA
87. Dr. Gregory Jackson	Ford Heights, IL
88. Mrs. Glenda Jackson	Leland, MS
89. Dr. Janiece Jackson	Broadview, IL
90. Mr. Reginald James	Quince, FL
91. Dr. Arthur Jarrett, Jr.	Sussex, VA
92. Dr. Shelton L. Jefferies	Nashville, NC
93. Mr. Ronn Johnson	Lawnsdale, NJ
94. Dr. Darrell Johnson	Greenwood, SC
95. Angela Johnson	Hollandale, MS
96. Dr. Sharon Johnson-Shirley	Gary, IN
97. Donald Jolly	Warrensville Heights, OH
98. Dr. Curtis Jones, Jr.	Mcaon, GA
99. Mrs. Shelly Davis Jones	Calumet City, IL
100. Dr. Sheldon Jones	Rayville, LA
101. Dr. Mary Jones	Wyandanch, NY
102. Mr. David Jones	Akron, OH
103. Dr. Jerry Jordan	South Holland, IL
104. Dr. Derrick D. Jordan	Pittsboro, NC
105. Dr. Shawn Joseph	Upper Marlboro, MD
106. Ms. Kelly Joseph	Greenburg, LA
107. Evelyn Joessll	Marks, MS
108. Dr. Marion King	Sommerville, TN

109. Michelle King	Los Angeles, CA
110. Roger Lidell	Macon, MS
111. Aaron Leavell, Ed.D	Bremerton, WA
112. Mr. Ronald Lee	Orange, NJ
113. Dr. Henderson Lewis, Jr.	New Orleans, LA
114. Dr. Lorna Lewis	Plainview, NY
115. Dr. William Lloyd	Uniondale, NY
116. Dr. Marcia Lyles	Jersey City, NJ
117. Dr. Dedrick Martin	St. Johns, MI
118. Dr. Von Mansfield	Flossmoor, IL
119. Ms. Jo Ann Matthews	Thibodeaux, LS
120. Dr. Demond Means	Mequon, WI
121. Dr. Amiot Michel	Salem, NJ
122. Dr. Voleria Millikin	Lake Providence, LA
123. Dr. James Mitchem	Romeoville, IL
124. Dr. Art McCoy	Jennings, MO
125. Mr. Burnell McDonald	West Point, MS
126. Dr. Michael McFarland	Lancaster, TX
127. Dr. Leland Moore	Coldspring, TX
128. Dr. Michele Morris	Calumet City, IL
129. Dr. Lesli Myers	Brockport, NY
130. Dr. Marcus Newsome	Chesterfield, VA
131. Thomas E. Parker	Ecorse, MI
132. Dr. Kimako Patterson	Markham, IL
133. Ms. Nanette Pauley	Marcellus, MI
134. Dr. Charles Pearson	St. Louis, MO
135. Dr. Fred Primm	Bessemer, AL
136. Dr. Noris Price	Milledgeville, GA

137. Dr. Mark Porterie	Port Arthur, TX
138. Dr. Bonita Coleman	Ocean Springs, MS
139. Ms. Anna Belin-Pyles	Plainfield, NJ
140. Dr. Lamont Repollet	Asbury Park, NJ
141. Terry Roller	Talladega, AL
142. Dr. Ernest Rose	Phoenix, AZ
143. Dr. Michael Robinson	Pine Bluff, AK
144. Linda B. Robinson	Shelby, MS
145. Will Russell	Prentiss, MS
146. Karen B. Salmon	Baltimore, MD
147. Carlos J. Sam	Clinton, LA
148. Mrs. Demica Sanders	Midfield, AL
149. Sonja Brookins Santelises	Towson, MD
150. Dr. Sharon Shields	Waco, TX
151. Anntte Speech	North Syracuse, NY
152. Dr. Joshua Talison	Flint, MI
153. Dr. Kent Taylor	Lennox, SD
154. Dr. John Thomas	Hopkins Park, IL
155. Dr. Timothy Thurman	Linden, AL
156. Mr. Vincent Turner	Fayette, MS
157. Dr. Shawn Vincent	Moss Point, MS
158. Dr. Delores Warnell	Bloomington, TX
159. Dr. Jesse Washington	Orangeburg, SC
160. Dr. Anitra D. Wells	Weldon, NC
161. Elliot Wheeler	Belzoni, MS
162. Dr. Fadhilkia Atiba-Weza	Hempstead, NY
163. Dr. Sonya Whitaker	Lockport, IL
164. Deatrice C. White	Coffeeville, MS



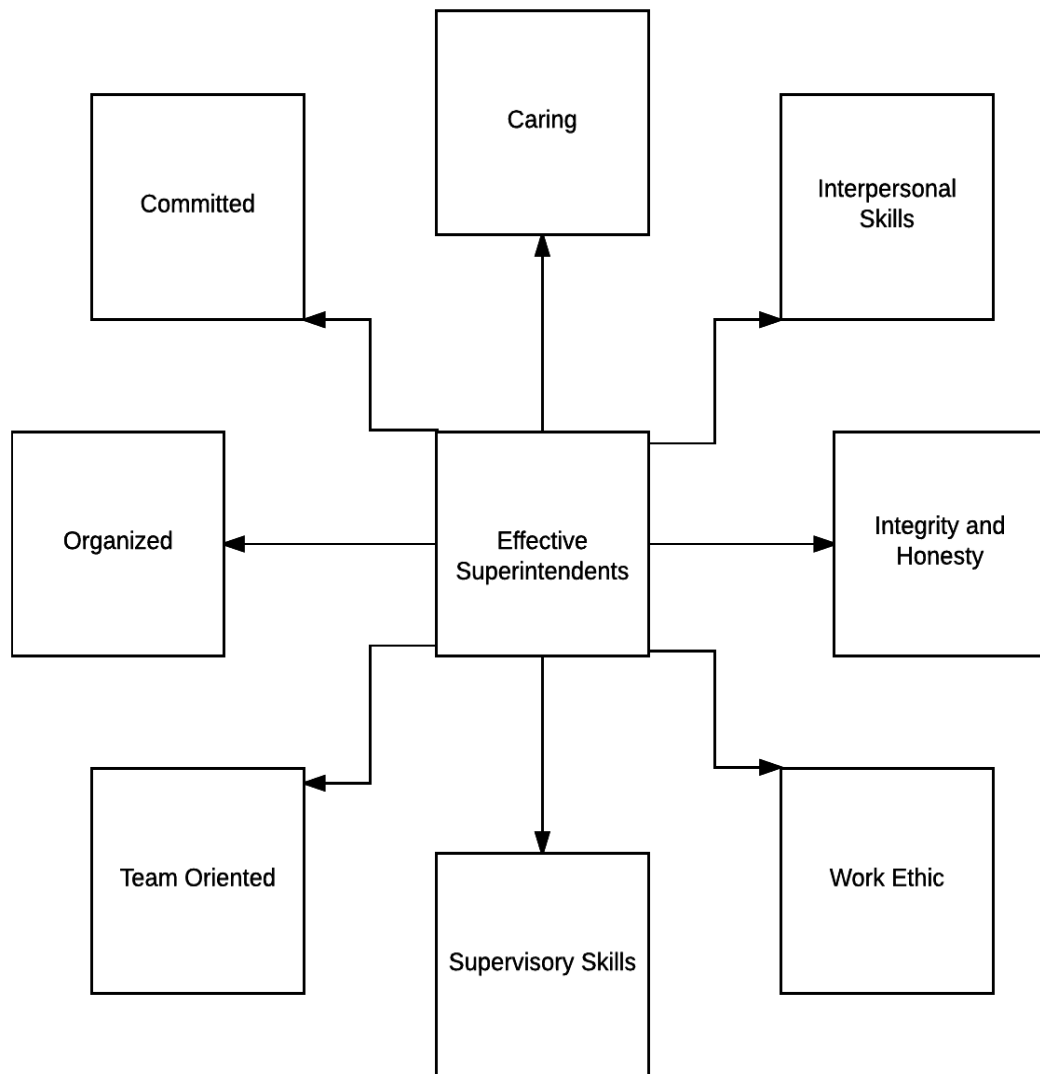
165. Dr. Deran Whitney	Suffolk, VA
166. Dr. Floyd E. Williams	Des. Plains, IL
167. Dr. Robert Williams	Hattiesburg,MS
168. Dr. Cardell Williams	Port Gibson, MS
169. Dr. Sheila Harrison-Williams	Hazel Crest, IL
170. Cassandra Williams	Canton, MS
171. Leila W. Williams, Ed.S	Fairfax, SC
172. Collen Mae Williams	St. Croix, VI
173. Dr. Ron Williams	Victorville, CA
174. Dr. Craig Witherspoon	Columbia, SC
175. Dr. Lynda Wood	Southfield, MI
176. Mrs. Cecila J. Robinson Woods	Oklahoma City, OK
177. Dr. Monica Smith-Woofter	Jackson, MS
178. Martin Wright	Estill, SC

Alliance of Black School Educators:  
Directory of African American Superintendents,  
January 2016

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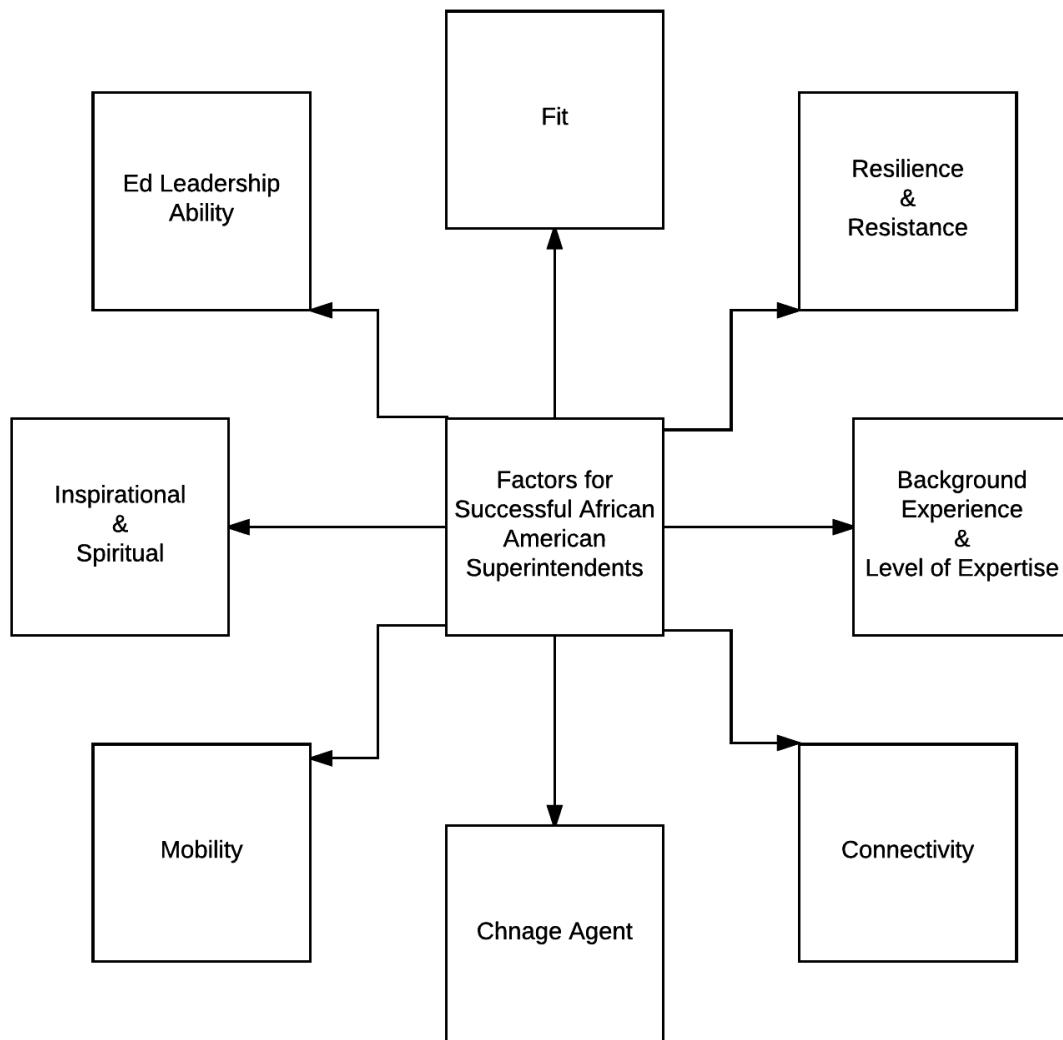
## APPENDIX E

### Personal Characteristics of Effective Superintendents



## APPENDIX F

### Success Factors for African American Superintendents



## APPENDIX G

### Role of the Superintendent

